

# Women's political participation and economic empowerment in post-conflict countries

Lessons from the Great Lakes region in Africa

July 2012



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## Acknowledgements

This report represents a synthesis of the key findings and recommendations of a regional research project on women's political participation and economic empowerment in countries emerging from conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa. The author of this report is Ndeye Sow, Senior Adviser in the Africa programme at International Alert. She is also the coordinator of the regional research project which was conducted in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

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## Tribute to Jeanne d'Arc Mihigo

Jeanne d'Arc Mihigo, member of the research team in Rwanda and co-author of the Rwandan case study, died tragically in the crash of the Hewa Bora Airways flight in Kisangani, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in July 2011. She was 41 years old.

Born to a Congolese father and a Rwandan mother, Jeanne was deeply concerned by the grave crisis facing DRC for more than a decade. In 2009, she published, in English, a book entitled *Rural development for conflict transformation. A case study of North Kivu*, in which she examined the linkages between rural development and conflicts in the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru in the province of North Kivu in Eastern DRC. She concluded that the restoration of the state authority, along with the promotion of good governance, were determining factors in building sustainable peace and lasting prosperity in DRC, in particular in the east of the country.

We recall about Jeanne her great professionalism, her generosity and unstinting commitment to the return of peace and the promotion of women's human rights in DRC.

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## Table of acronyms

<b>ADD</b>	Association pour la défense des droits des femmes [Association for the defence of women's rights]
<b>ADEPAE</b>	Action pour le développement et la paix endogène [Action for development and endogenous peace]
<b>ADR</b>	Alliance démocratique pour le renouveau [Democratic alliance for renewal]
<b>AFEMSK</b>	Association des femmes des médias du Sud Kivu [Association of media women in South Kivu]
<b>CAFCO</b>	Cadre permanent de concertation de la femme congolaise [Permanent consultative framework of Congolese women]
<b>CAFOB</b>	Collectif des associations et organisations non gouvernementales féminines du Burundi [Collective womens' associations and NGOs in Burundi]
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CNDD-FDD</b>	Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de de la Démocratie [National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy]
<b>CNF</b>	Conseil national des femmes [National council of women]
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>DYNAFEP</b>	Dynamique des femmes politiques [Dynamics of woman politicians]
<b>ICD</b>	Inter-Congolese Dialogue
<b>INEC</b>	Independent National Electoral Commission
<b>MIGEPROF</b>	Ministère du Genre et le Promotion de la Famille [Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion]
<b>MINALOC</b>	Ministry of Local Government, Community Development and Social Affairs
<b>MINECOFIN</b>	Ministère des Finances et de la Planification Economique [Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning]
<b>NRA</b>	National Resistance Army
<b>PRDP</b>	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan
<b>SACCO</b>	Savings and Credit Cooperative
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community

## Executive summary

One of the positive results of peace processes and political transitions in the Great Lakes region in Africa during the last ten to fifteen years has been the representation and increased involvement of women in politics and in the public sphere. This major step forward in favour of women was primarily achieved thanks to the adoption of quota systems, as well as through co-optation. The constitutions adopted by Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during the post-conflict transition periods include provisions which integrate female representation quotas of at least 30 percent in decision-making institutions. In DRC the constitution adopted by referendum in December 2005 went even further by including the principle of equal representation. The reconstruction of northern Uganda, following a murderous twenty-year long conflict, has provided opportunities for women, who have been playing a prominent role in the region's economic recovery.

This report represents a synthesis of the key findings and recommendations of a regional research project on women's political participation and economic empowerment in countries emerging from conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa. The research project, conducted in Burundi, Rwanda, DRC and Uganda, was undertaken jointly by International Alert and the Eastern Africa Sub-regional Support Initiative (EASSI), in partnership with some of the leading women's organisations in the four countries, as well as the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

The research focuses on four case studies and examines the nature and quality of women's political participation in the four countries to establish whether women's increased representation in decision making at the national and local governance level has translated into the adoption of gender equality policies and enhancement of women's socio-economic status at all levels of society. The research further analyses the economic dimension of women's political participation by linking women's economic empowerment and their representation in the political arena.

The four case studies focused on the following specific issues:

- In Rwanda: the study examined and analysed the integration of gender equality into the decentralisation process and the impact on women's participation in national and local governance. The study entitled "*Promouvoir l'égalité entre les sexes dans les processus de décentralisation et la gouvernance locale: leçons du Rwanda*" (Promoting gender equality into decentralisation processes and local governance: lessons from Rwanda) is available on International Alert website (<http://www.international-alert.org/resources>)
- In Burundi: the case study looked at the nature and impact of women's participation in the Arusha peace process and the impact of the quota system in promoting women in national and local government. The case study entitled "*A la conquête de la parole. La participation des femmes dans la transition démocratique au Burundi*" (Speaking out: Women's participation in the political transition in Burundi) can be downloaded from our website.
- In Uganda: the study set out to examine and understand the position of women in the peace economy and politics, and the interaction between their increased economic power and their participation in political and public life. The title of the study is "*Post-war economic opportunities in northern Uganda: implications for women's empowerment and political participation*". It can be downloaded from the International Alert website.
- In DRC: the study assessed women's participation in the inter-Congolese dialogue and the 2006 general elections. The study entitled: "*La participation des femmes dans les processus*



*de paix et la prise de décision politique en République Démocratique du Congo*” (Women’s participation in peace processes and political decision-making in the Democratic Republic of Congo) is available on International Alert’s website.

A summary of the main findings of these case studies is presented below:

### 1. Women at the negotiating table

The case studies on Burundi and DRC, which reviewed women’s participation in the official peace processes in Arusha for Burundi and in the inter-Congolese Dialogue at Sun City in South Africa, concluded that, despite their low level of representation in these processes, Burundian and Congolese women nevertheless managed to have provisions for women’s rights and gender equality included in the 2000 Arusha peace accord and the 2002 Global and All-inclusive Agreement for DRC. However, the wording of the principle of gender equality was kept very general, particularly regarding women’s representation in governing political bodies. This partly explains the difficulties and/or slowness in implementing most of these provisions. In DRC in particular, the principle of a quota of 30 percent women’s representation in state institutions, which was promised to women in Sun City, was never enforced. Afterwards, Congolese women successfully lobbied for the inclusion of the principle of 50-50 parity representation in the constitution adopted in 2006, but there again mechanisms for implementing parity were never adopted. In Burundi, a quota of 30 percent representation for women at the highest level of governance was finally enshrined in the constitution adopted in March 2005, five years after the signing of the Arusha peace accord. It took another four years before the quota of 30 percent representation for women was added to the electoral code following its reform in 2009.

### 2. Impact of quota policies

The case study on Burundi also carried out an assessment of nearly five years of a 30 percent women’s representation quota in political institutions. It appears that, despite the fact that quotas significantly increased the number of women in decision-making bodies at all levels, including local governance, this did not necessarily lead to substantial and effective representation of women or to significant reduction in inequalities between men and women. Women, especially those living in rural and peri-urban areas, continue to face major constraints such as poverty, lack of access to land and property, illiteracy and heavy domestic workloads.

The adoption of a quotas system was not accompanied by a transformation of the political and institutional systems, which remain heavily masculine and hamper the promotion of gender equality. The combination of ethnic and regional quotas, adopted in 2005, tended to reinforce ethnic and regionally-based allegiances as well as ethnic and political isolationism, pushing politicians, including women, into partisan positions accordingly. Nonetheless, the increased representation of women in state institutions may be having gradual positive effects on social transformation in Burundi. It seems that women are progressively building up self-confidence, resulting in their increased access to speech within the public sphere, as well as higher social respect.

### 3. Decentralisation processes: the challenges of mainstreaming gender

As in Burundi, the quota policy implemented by the Rwandan government led to a greater representation of women in the decentralisation process, which began in early 2000. However, the principle of gender equality has not been properly integrated into the process and decentralisation has not provided a space which could have allowed women to influence the policies defined at the local governance level. Women continue to be under-represented in key positions related to policy and programme implementation. Furthermore, decentralised bodies lack the technical, material and financial resources to implement a gender equality policy effectively. The lack of expertise on gender analysis and gender budgeting of technical and local counsellors has become one of the main obstacles to mainstreaming gender into planning and budgeting processes.

Women are also marginalised in public participation fora, which have been designed to enable people to take part in discussions relating to development priorities and programme implementation. Nevertheless, issues related to gender equality are brought up in these fora, particularly violence against women, land tenure and property ownership, as well as family planning. The study concludes that the decentralisation process in Rwanda offers opportunities to close the gender gap and achieve more equality. However, this is subject to the strengthening of decision-making powers of decentralised bodies and local communities so that they can take ownership of the decentralisation process.

#### 4. Women's representation in electoral processes

In DRC, women were actively involved in the 2006 general elections, the first to take place in the country in over thirty years. They made up the majority of voters, about 64 percent, for the legislative elections. However, very few of them managed to get elected: 8 percent at the National Assembly and 8.6 percent in the Senate. Women were penalised by a perverted electoral system and biases in the composition of electoral lists. They also suffered from insufficient financial means, a lack of political experience and the mobilising power to build a broad and strong electoral base.

The anti-democratic and conservative nature of political systems and social and religious institutions in DRC hinder the effective implementation of parity, despite it being entrenched in the constitution. Despite the adoption of some measures for women's greater participation in political and public life, numerous provisions which discriminate against women still exist in various laws relating to the family and women's personal lives. The Family Code, for instance, still subjects married women to the guardianship of their husbands. The gender norms and stereotypes which structure gender relations are the major obstacles to the equal representation of women in political and public life in DRC.

#### 5. Economic power and political participation

Poverty and lack of economic security are often regarded as some of the major barriers to women's political participation. However, in northern Uganda, the advances made by women in the economic sphere have not given them a more prominent position in political decision making. Indeed, women have played a key role in the region's economic recovery after the war, enabling them to increase their income significantly; however, not at a level which would allow them to achieve economic security, and break free from the cycle of economic survival and merely meeting practical needs.

In addition, development and reconstruction policies in northern Uganda have not taken into account the important contribution made by women in the building of a peace economy. Despite the commitment made by most development agencies operational on the ground to mainstream gender into their programmes, women are still viewed as a vulnerable group instead of fully-fledged economic agents. They continue to be marginalised from the major development plans set up by the government and international development agencies at the end of the war. Furthermore, very little attention has been paid by development planners to the high levels of sexual violence against women and the way in which unequal gender relations continue to affect the economic recovery.

All this explains, to a large extent, women's poor participation in politics in northern Uganda, even though their increased income has allowed many of them to play a more central role in decision making within the household and to acquire greater mobility and influence in decision-making bodies in communities.

## Recommendations

The four case studies identified priorities and strategic actions to strengthen the participation of women in political and public life, as well as to acknowledge and support their pivotal role in the economic recovery of the region.

The recommendations are as follows:

### Burundi

- Create a statistical database on women's political participation;
- Assess progress made by Burundi in implementing its national and international commitments towards gender equality by using well-known gender indicators such as the African gender and development index (AGDI)<sup>1</sup>. This assessment could be carried out in collaboration between the government of Burundi, relevant United Nations agencies and civil society organisations;
- Pass the Bill on women's rights to inheritance and land ownership: the government and National assembly should pass the Bill reforming the Code on inheritance, matrimonial regimes and gifts, which has been under review since 2002;
- Integrate effectively the principle of gender equality into national policies and development programmes: it must be ensured that the Vision 2025 and the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) actively mainstream gender. This implies:
  - publicising and implementing national gender policy through the establishment of structures envisioned by the law such as the Gender National Council;
  - providing structures for gender equality with enough human and financial resources to efficiently accomplish their mission;
  - guaranteeing that the selection of women candidates to positions of power are based on merit and "representativity" in order to overcome objections to the introduction of quotas for women.
- Put in place mechanisms to allow the raising of the educational level of women and girls and reduce the burden of heavy workload: thought should be given to ways of allowing women to free up time aside from household work and daily domestic chores, such as fetching water and gathering firewood. Consideration should also be given to organising a wide functional literacy campaign, which would include, among others, components on political and civic education, the Family Code, resource management and family planning. This campaign would target both women and men;
- Develop and reinforce alliances and networks among women by putting in place a permanent structure for consultation between women politicians and those from civil society. Through this mechanism, joint programmes highlighting women's priorities would be developed and encourage those women elected to positions of power to commit themselves to it;
- Encourage women's political participation through specific concrete actions: develop partnerships between women's organisations and men who are sensitive and committed to gender equality (politicians, and religious, customary and civil society leaders) in order to strengthen advocacy for women's increased participation in political life and for gender equality;
- Encourage the government to respect its national, regional and international commitments on promoting gender equality: the support of the international community is essential to enable Burundi to meet its commitments on gender equality. In that sense, respect for gender equality should be a criterion for eligibility for international cooperation programmes negotiated with the Burundian government. The international community should also support capacity building for women regarding political participation and be involved in the monitoring of gender indicators.

<sup>1</sup> The AGDI, or African Gender and Development Index, is a tool which maps the extent of gender inequality in Africa and assesses government performance. It consists of two parts: the qualitative Gender Status Index (GSI) and the qualitative African's Women Progress Scoreboard (AWPS). For further information about the AGDI see UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2004). *The African Gender and Development Index*. Addis Ababa.

## Rwanda

### For the Government

- Develop a programme to build and strengthen the capacities of decentralised entities on gender analysis and gender planning and budgeting in order to improve the extent to which gender is taken into account in performance contracts and budgets. Methods of developing performance contracts must include specific gender indicators in each area of planning;
- Develop better quantitative and qualitative indicators allowing the measurement of changes in gender equality at the individual, institutional and community level;
- Provide decentralised entities with gender experts to ensure that gender analysis is integrated at all stages of the decentralisation process;
- Support the districts in the production of development plans, taking into account the gender dimension and develop partnerships with stakeholders who work in decentralisation in order to influence the inclusion of gender in their planning;
- Include analysis of obstacles which communities face in the monitoring of public action in regular evaluations of the decentralisation process, especially with regard to gender, to enable the initiation of strategies to reduce these obstacles.
- Strengthen the capacity of Ministry of Gender staff in charge of gender issues in the districts, so they become more capable of supporting and supervising gender mainstreaming in the plans and budgets of decentralised entities;
- Support critical thinking and analysis designed to identify strategies and programmes to reduce women's heavy workload and provide support for women who work in decision-making bodies in decentralised entities (taking into account the obstacles to their participation). These analyses should influence the planning and budgeting of development actions on the part of decentralised entities and central government;
- Create a continuous education and awareness programme for local communities on gender equality to reduce resistance to change and support progress. The programme should also include discussions with families about educating their daughters to the highest possible level.

### For the National Council of Women (NCW) and other civil society organisations

- Redefine the role of NCW agents in the districts to allow cooperation and synergy with other units in districts, sectors and cells;
- Support the local chapters of the NCW in decentralised entities to develop strategies to take part in decentralised governance processes, particularly in influencing participation mechanisms to better take gender equality issues into account;
- Collaborate on or advocate for education programmes on leadership and other activities which strengthen the capacities of women in decision-making positions or candidates for these positions.
- Encourage and facilitate networking between women leaders in decentralised entities to help them further their analysis on the obstacles to women's participation and conduct advocacy with relevant authorities.

### For the Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA)

- Become involved in projects which promote gender equality in local government (such as PAGOR) and capitalise on gains so that other districts can also benefit from them;
- Initiate a network of women leaders in decentralised entities to help them examine more deeply the obstacles to women's participation and lobby the relevant decision-making bodies.

## Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- Establish inclusive and representative political structures by increasing and strengthening women's presence in central state and customary/community institutions and structures, as well as political parties. This would imply the adoption and effective implementation of the law on parity and the subsequent reform of the electoral code;
- Develop and strengthen the political socialisation of women and transform the political behaviours of both women and men by mainstreaming gender into the various agents of socialisation, particularly in schools, mass media and religious institutions;
- Make the link between the local and global level by bringing together state actors, women's organisations, local communities and wider civil society around a common ideal: working to promote women's participation in a context of national reconstruction.

## Northern Uganda

- Make gender a core element in the design and implementation of economic recovery programmes in northern Uganda;
- Ensure strategic institutional development for women: this requires extensive mobilisation of women, to train them on contracts and awards and to increase their capacity to form companies and joint ventures;
- Promote a political culture within women's groups and train women on how to effectively participate at various levels and form political alliances and coalitions across parties;
- Mobilise men and boys to reconstruct positive masculinities, and involve them in actions to prevent and respond to violence against women. There is also an urgent need to bring men back into household provisioning and sustenance.

# 1. Introduction

Despite their devastating nature, the conflicts which have affected the Great Lakes region have introduced a measure of fluidity into the traditional social order, which has allowed the creation of spaces dedicated to expression and political action, of which women, to a certain extent, have been able to take advantage. Conflicts have played a major catalysing role in the emergence of a women's movement which has been able, in critical moments, to overcome ethnic and political divisions to unite and mobilise around key issues pertaining to the promotion of women's political, economic and social rights. Spaces for expression and political action for women have been expanded and strengthened through their participation in informal peace processes and official peace talks. Women's active participation in political transitions and post-conflict reconstruction has further contributed to opening up the political and economic spheres to a greater number of women.

Although these developments are of undeniable importance and should be lauded, women still face significant challenges. The widespread feeling among some of the region's leading women's organisations is that the political, economic and cultural environment is not always conducive to the substantial and efficient participation of women, as well as to the formulation of the issues affecting them. The introduction of gender quotas did not necessarily result in the adoption of gender-responsive policies; nor did they result in the modification of the socio-economic status of women at all levels of society. The institutionalisation of achievements, and the transformation of power relations within institutions and political systems in order to make them more gender responsive, are issues central to the question of women's political activeness in the region. The same applies to the topics of culture and traditions, which have a significant impact on the participation of women, while the lack of access and control of resources, as well as insufficient economic power, are key factors in the exclusion of women from the political arena.

This research project fits into the conceptual framework according to which the inclusion and participation of women are inherent factors of peace, and that greater inclusion enhances peace and security. In this sense the full, effective participation of women in politics is a necessary component of peace processes and of post-conflict reconstruction. The study has adopted a view of political participation which is broader than the traditional understanding of the concept which limits politics to involvement in formal processes, government institutions and electoral processes. Indeed, political processes also include informal politics and the dynamics relating to everyday life.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, social movements, especially those in which women are involved, make for a form of political participation much in the same way as involvement in more formal processes within governments. Some analysts also draw attention towards the relations influencing all levels of society, including power relations within the private sphere, households and the family.<sup>3</sup>

The research project also takes into consideration the fact that women do not constitute a homogeneous category; rather, they have differentiated identities shaped by their ethnicity, political affiliation, social class, age and social status.

The research project's objectives were:

Global objective:

- Improve the efficiency of women's contribution to the restoration of peace and security in the Great Lakes region in Africa.

<sup>2</sup> M. L. Krook and S. Childs (2010). *Women, gender and politics. A reader*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

### Specific objectives:

- Review the nature of women's political action and how it contributes to improving peace and security in the Great Lakes region.
- Contribute to the transformation of political and social institutions impeding the efficient and qualitative participation of women.
- Support the exchange of experiences and analyses between the region's women for a better understanding of the differentiated positions and roles of men and women in the political sphere.

On-site research and four case studies were conducted in each country by national research teams, which received specific training in terms of gender-sensitive research methodology during a methodology workshop held in Kampala in June 2009. The workshop was facilitated by Professor Aminata Diaw from the University Cheick Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal, and Dr. Josephine Ahikire, Associate Professor at the School of Women and gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

The main concerns which guided the research articulated themselves around the following questions:

1. Are conflicts an opportunity for women? Do they contribute to the creation of spaces for expression and action? Under which circumstances?
2. How do conflicts contribute to shaping the perception of women's participation in politics?
3. What is the nature and quality of women's participation in politics and what impact does their representation have on decision making?
4. What is the nature of the state and of the political and institutional systems in the region and how does this affect the participation of women?
5. How does the participation of women take into account aspects such as identity, culture and ethnicity?
6. Is there a link between the economic empowerment of women and their increased participation in the political sphere?

Additional questions specific to each country were developed by the local research teams. The study chose a participatory, gender-based approach, focusing on processes. In-field data collection was conducted through discussion groups, in-depth interviews of key informants, as well as questionnaires.



## 2. The involvement of women at the negotiating table: the Burundi peace talks held in Arusha and the Sun City inter-Congolese dialogue

Official peace processes, also known as “Track 1 Diplomacy”, are processes from which women continue to be largely excluded. The number of women having held an official role during such processes, in particular during peace negotiations, remains very low throughout the world. A study by UNIFEM on 21 official peace processes since the mid-nineties shows that women only account for 2.4 percent of the signatories to peace agreements resulting from these processes. For 10 of these 21 peace processes, the representation of women among official delegations at the negotiating table amounted to an average of 5.9 percent.<sup>4</sup> The absence of women at negotiating tables persists, despite the adoption of international legislation including, among others, the Beijing Platform<sup>5</sup> and UN Security Council resolution 1325,<sup>6</sup> which call for the acknowledgement of women’s right to equal participation and involvement in all aspects and at all phases of peacebuilding processes and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as the integration of gender perspectives into these processes.

The case studies on Burundi and Rwanda review the participation of women in peace processes in these two countries over the last ten years, which led in both cases to the signing of peace agreements. The peace talks for Burundi began in June 1998 in Arusha, Tanzania. These talks, which lasted for over two years, resulted in the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement on 28th August 2000. In DRC, the inter-Congolese dialogue (ICD) held in Sun City, South Africa, from 25th February to 12th April 2002, was designed as a national reconciliation process to negotiate the terms of a new political order. The ICD concluded with the signature of the Global and All-inclusive Agreement on 17th December 2002 in Pretoria, South Africa, which allowed the appointment of an interim government in June 2003. Women were largely excluded from these processes, which were crucial steps in the recent political history of these two countries. Only a very small number of women were able to access these negotiations and even this was the result of intense lobbying.

The two case studies have analysed the strategies chosen by women to gain access to the negotiating table and the impact of their presence on the negotiation process in order to determine, whether, in these two countries, the presence of women played a role in the establishment of peace agreements sensitive to gender equality issues. The results of this research study are presented and analysed in the following sections.

### 2.1 Only a small percentage of women were able to take part in the Arusha peace talks in Burundi and the inter-Congolese dialogue in DRC

The Arusha peace talks for Burundi mainly concerned the representatives of 17 political parties and armed movements approved by the Burundi government and the National Assembly. Women, as well as other civil society groups and religious communities, remained largely excluded from the talks. During the first round of negotiations in Arusha in June 1998, there were only two women among the 126 delegates. The case study highlighted that ‘...indeed, the Arusha negotiations were perceived

<sup>4</sup> UNIFEM (2009). *Women’s participation in peace negotiations: connections between presence and influence*. New York.

<sup>5</sup> The issue of women in armed conflicts is one of the 12 areas of intervention identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, which was adopted in 1995. The Beijing Platform underlines the fact that women are often absent from peace negotiations and insists on the necessity of including them in conflict-resolution processes.

<sup>6</sup> The 1325 resolution, relating to Women, Peace and Security, adopted on 31st October 2000 by the Security Council of the United Nations, urges Member States to take the necessary measures to protect the rights of girls and women during armed conflicts, to increase the involvement of women at all levels of decision making, and to ensure gender equality during all peacemaking and peacekeeping operations.



as the privatisation of political matters and of the country's future by political parties'.<sup>7</sup> The women's movement was the only civil society component to mobilise and organise itself in order to claim the right for women to participate in the Arusha talks. Women's organisations leveraged international legislation for the promotion of women's rights such as the Beijing Platform and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These pieces of legislation were used as tools to carry out intensive advocacy in favour of their participation, aimed at several Heads of State from the region, particularly the Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, who was also the official mediator for the Arusha peace talks.

During the second round of negotiations, which took place from 20th to 29th July 1998, women had to literally crash the event, arriving in Arusha as a delegation although no such delegation had been officially authorised beforehand. After this, Nyerere supported women by organising consultations on the issue of their participation with the delegation heads of the different parties present in Arusha. The South African president, Nelson Mandela, who took over as mediator after Nyerere's death in October 1999, offered women the same kind of support. A group of seven women<sup>8</sup> were finally given permanent observer status in January 2000, only eight months before the end of the talks.<sup>9</sup> In the end, women represented a mere 10 percent of the conference's participants.

In DRC, the Sun City ICD was a little more inclusive, involving not only the government and armed movements, but also the non-armed political opposition, as well as civil society. However, as in Burundi, the inclusion of women in the ICD was not an easy task. No women had taken part in the previous peace talks held in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 1999, which had resulted in the signature of a ceasefire agreement between the conflicting parties. It was during the Lusaka conference that the different components, which would later become part of the ICD, were identified; those principles which would later become guidelines for the ICD were defined and adopted. Only 9 percent of the attendees of the meeting of the ICD's Preparatory Committee in Gaborone, Botswana, in August 2001 were women. These women, however, played an important role by writing an open letter to the delegates of the Gaborone meeting in which they denounced the under-representation of women. The signatories of this open letter also used international legislation in favour of women, reminding DRC that it was a signatory of CEDAW and a member of the SADC,<sup>10</sup> which adopted a 30 percent female representation quota in its decision-making bodies, while also referring to the clauses of the 1325 resolution. However, despite these efforts, female participation remained weak throughout the process. Women's representation at the Sun City and Pretoria gatherings, which led to the signature on 17th December 2002 of the Comprehensive and All Inclusive Agreement, was only 16 percent and 13 percent respectively.

Five years later, Congolese women were to face the same exclusion during the conference on peace, stability and development of the North and South Kivu provinces, which was held in Goma, in North Kivu in January 2008. According to the selection procedure for participation at the conference, the various components of the government, the armed rebellion, political parties and CSOs were all required to be represented by a delegation composed of three men and a woman. These participation criteria disadvantaged women, who represented only 25 percent of participants.

The arguments in favour of equal participation of women in peace talks highlight the fact that the nature of peace agreements has significantly changed over the past twenty years. Indeed, until the 1990s, they were primarily considered to be contracts between warring parties in order to put an end to armed conflict and violence. Nowadays, peace agreements have turned into "roadmaps". Not only do they mark the official cessation of hostilities between warring

7 V. Ndikumana and C. Sebudandi (2011). *A la conquête de la parole. La participation des femmes dans la transition démocratique au Burundi [Fighting for speech. Women's participation in Burundi's democratic transition]*. International Alert and EASSI: London, 2012, p.12.

8 These women represented the various civil society women's organisations.

9 The Arusha Peace Agreement was signed on 28th August 2000.

10 DRC joined SADC in 1998.

parties, but they also provide a political framework for the definition, negotiation and adoption of the terms and priorities of the peacebuilding process with regard to reconciliation and socio-economic reconstruction, as well as the reform of institutions, for instance in the judicial and security sectors. International institutions and aid donors which finance peacebuilding processes now form an integral part of these discussions, on which they have a significant impact.<sup>11</sup>

**‘In post-conflict situations, as new institutions and legislative structures are being defined, it is imperative for women to be present at the peace negotiations table and that they are part of decision making after the war’.**

Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM

Most of the peace treaties negotiated and signed under these conditions end up becoming the base from which future constitutions are drafted. The constitutions adopted in Burundi and DRC are based on the Arusha Peace Agreement and the Global and All-inclusive Agreement respectively. For this reason it is important for women to be present at the negotiation table, where they can be involved in the definition of priorities and make sure that the provisions outlined in the agreement, which will then be reflected in the constitution, incorporate the needs and interests of women, as well as the principle of gender equality.

## 2.2 Women coming together to define and adopt a common programme for peace

In both countries, women gathered together in coalitions in order to develop a common programme aimed at influencing the peace talks and to make sure that a gender dimension was introduced into the peace agreements. The multi-party Women’s Peace Conference in Burundi, which was held in Arusha from 17th to 20th July 2000, was a turning point in terms of the participation of Burundian women in the peace process. For the first time, just one month before the end of the negotiations, this conference brought together over fifty women representing all the negotiating parties in Arusha.

A set of recommendations was drafted and presented to negotiators for inclusion in the peace treaty. These recommendations concerned, *inter alia*, the following points: the inclusion of rape in the list of causes of insecurity and violence against women and its classification as a crime against humanity; adoption of a 30 percent female representation quota within governing bodies; the taking into account of the specific vulnerability of women and children when defining repatriation policies for refugees and the reinsertion of displaced and internally regrouped people; the guarantee of women’s rights to property, land ownership and inheritance.

The same unified approach was chosen by Congolese women, who gathered together at the Nairobi conference in February 2001 in order to develop a common programme for peace, which would then be presented at the Sun City ICD. This conference, which brought together sixty-four women, was held in a period during which DRC, in the midst of war, was separated into two parts: the western part of the country was under government control and the eastern part under the control of armed rebels.

Since it was impossible to organise the meeting inside the country, the Congolese women decided to meet in Nairobi, Kenya. At the end of the meeting they adopted similar claims to those made by the Burundian women. This shows the common nature of the problems with which women from countries at war in the Great Lakes region are faced. These claims, set down in two important documents, the Nairobi Declaration and the Nairobi Action Plan, can be summarised as follows:

11 C. Bell and C. O’Rourke [2010]. ‘Peace agreements or pieces of paper? The impact of UNSRC 1325 on peace processes and their agreements’, *ICLQ Vol. 59*, pp.941-980.

the immediate stop to hostilities, withdrawal of foreign troops from Congolese territories and reunification of the country; creation of a Ministry of Gender to deal with issues related to the promotion of women and gender equality; establishment of a 30 percent female representation quota in all decision-making bodies; inclusion of the principles contained in CEDAW within the preamble of DRC's future constitution.

### 2.3 Was the presence of women during negotiations sufficient to produce peace agreements which integrated gender equality principles?

This question is particularly important if one considers the fact that only 16 percent of peace agreements signed throughout the world between January 1990 and January 2010 contain specific references to women.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, a review of the twenty official UNIFEM-led peace processes in 2009 showed that, even when women took part in the formal peace process with non-speaking observer status, they were nonetheless able to have provisions benefiting women incorporated into peace agreements.<sup>13</sup> In the twenty reviewed peace processes, this fact proved particularly true in the case of the Uganda, Darfur, Burundi, DRC, and Liberia peace talks.<sup>14</sup>

In Burundi and DRC women developed strategies in order to influence the talks. For instance, the group of women with observer status at the Arusha talks, after working closely with the few female members of the official conference delegations, submitted written contributions on all matters under discussion, as well as on the different versions of the agreement.<sup>15</sup> The strategy chosen by the Congolese women was to set up a women's caucus in Sun City, which regrouped all women attending the conference as official delegation members, as well as the women from civil society women's organisations, who had been invited to attend as experts. Therefore, the two groups were able to work together in the caucus in order to influence the debates and the content of the agreement.

Both the texts of the Arusha Peace Agreement and of the Global and All-inclusive Agreement set forth the idea of correcting imbalances in terms of male and female participation in all areas of public life. However, the wording of this principle was kept very general, particularly in terms of governing political institutions. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the women's very specific request for a 30 percent female representation quota in decision-making bodies was not accepted in either country. In the case of Burundi, it is noteworthy that most of the propositions which women made to ensure greater consideration of gender equality in the Burundi institutional system, and which were rejected, could be found in the agreement's Protocol II, which defined the terms and conditions of the transitional period as well as of power sharing between the various negotiating parties. The principle of gender equality is more explicitly stated in other sectors such as public administration and the judiciary. Both agreements also make reference to CEDAW and to its integration into each country's constitution. However, the request of the Burundian women to have acts of rape perpetrated during the war be recognised as crimes against humanity and to have them punished as such were rejected by the Arusha negotiators.

Nonetheless, 60 percent of the propositions made by Burundian women were incorporated into the Arusha peace agreement, which, along with the Guatemala peace agreement signed in 1996, is considered to be one of the most successful peace treaties in terms of the promotion of women and gender equality-related issues.<sup>16</sup> It seems that, besides the impact of women's activism, in both cases this success should also be attributed to the United Nations' influence on negotiations, as

<sup>12</sup> UNIFEM (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Y. Budomo and I. Nzirorera (2006). 'Evaluation de la participation des femmes au processus électoral au Burundi [Evaluation of the participation of women in the electoral process in Burundi]', *ONUB*, Gender Unit: Burundi.

<sup>16</sup> C. Bell and C. O'Rourke (2010). *Op. Cit.*

well as to the role played by mediators and, in the Burundi case, by Nelson Mandela, to ensure the inclusion of a gender dimension in the negotiated peace agreements.<sup>17</sup>

The implementation of some of the provisions was progressive and lasted throughout the transition and post-transition phases. In Burundi, despite the rejection of the 30 percent female representation quota, the idea of more equal representation was nonetheless taken into account during the establishment of transitional institutions. For instance, 33 percent of the members of the monitoring commission for the implementation of the Arusha peace agreement, created in November 2000, were women. Following the creation of a transitional National Assembly, which included all political parties and armed movements which took part in the negotiations, as well as representatives of civil society, all new entrants were asked to nominate a least one woman in the list of four deputies to which they were entitled. Thanks to this co-optation system, the percentage of female parliamentarians practically doubled from 9.8 percent in the former 1993-elected assembly, to 18 percent in the new one. The transitional Senate, which had been the object of negotiations during the peace talks, consisted of 19.23 percent women. The 30 percent female representation quota was finally included in the post-transition constitution, adopted in 2004.

In DRC, only a small amount of provisions were implemented, among which the creation of a Ministry of Gender and Family Protection was established in 2003. However, the post-transition constitution adopted on 18th February 2006 represents a major breakthrough as it guarantees the gender balance of representation in national, provincial and local institutions. However, the implementation of gender balance poses major challenges, and the necessary steps to allow its institutionalisation have never been taken.

## 2.4 Limits to solidarity between women

The unity and solidarity displayed by women during the peace processes in both countries did not survive the transition and post-transition phases. In fact, as shown by research, the alliances developed between women remained fragile throughout the processes in view of the extreme political, ethnical and social polarisation in which women themselves were involved.

In Burundi, for instance, the women's movement was deeply divided in terms of how to deal with the economic embargo on the country, which had been imposed by neighbouring countries.<sup>18</sup> The embargo had turned into a highly political issue, which deeply divided Burundian politicians. The divides between women occurred on similar political and ethnical bases to those dividing the political class.

The dialogue to develop a common programme for peace, which had been initiated between women living within the country and those in exile (for what were often political reasons), had not been easy to carry out. The Burundian women's multi-party conference mentioned above was held in a tense atmosphere. As underlined by the study: 'It constituted a real challenge due to the ethnic, political and social heterogeneity of the groups of women present, even though it finally could be held. There were sometimes deep divergences among the women due to differing political opinions. The women representing political parties tended to align themselves on the positions of their respective political groups. It ended up taking a lot of patience, know-how and intelligence on behalf of the conference's organisers to facilitate communication between the women and bring them to agree on the issues uniting them'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> These countries joined together to form the Regional Peace Initiative for Burundi, following the *coup d'état* which had brought Pierre Buyoya back to power in July 1996.

<sup>19</sup> V. Ndikumana and C. Sebudandi (2012). *Op. Cit.*, p.13.

In the same way, the study showed that women were not always able to stay united during the transition and post-transition periods, which sometimes caused a barrier to their efforts to implement the gains of their participation in the peace talks.

In DRC, the women's caucus, which had played a central role in creating a space where official delegates from the various conflicting parties could meet away from the formal negotiations, did not survive after Sun City. The informal status of the caucus had encouraged frank and open discussions to take place between women from the different political constituents during the Sun City negotiations. However, due to the extremely tense and sometimes even hostile atmosphere in which the talks took place, the feeling of solidarity between delegates began to erode, with delegates promoting the same political line as their political parties to the detriment of the programme set by the Nairobi Action Plan. These divisions worsened as the women returned to DRC at the end of the Sun City conference. Beset by influence and leadership struggles between various political tendencies, the caucus eventually broke up on the eve of the 2006 presidential and legislative elections. Other structures have since emerged, contributing to the disruption of the women's movement and making it difficult to organise a concerted effort to manage the gains obtained thanks to the participation of women at the ICD. The study on DRC observed that, despite praiseworthy experiences, women were not able to capitalise on the collective campaigns for peace and certain coordination structures set up during the peace talks, so they fell apart just as their actions were gaining momentum.<sup>20</sup>

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20 C. Odimba, P.R. Namegabe and J. Baseke (2012). *La participation des femmes dans les processus de paix et la prise de décision politique en République Démocratique du Congo [Women's participation in the peace process and political decision making in DRC]*. International Alert/EASSI: London, p.32.

### 3. Assessment of the new quota system in Burundi: impact on the political representation of women

Quotas are perceived as one of the quickest and most efficient means to increase the representation of women within decision-making bodies. Three of the four countries researched for this report have adopted quotas to promote the representation of women within government institutions and are now among the ten leading African countries with the largest amount of women in their parliaments. Burundi, which has made tremendous progress in this regard over the last ten years, is now in eighth position on this list. Uganda, which has a longer tradition in terms of the adoption of quotas, is in sixth position. As for Rwanda, which has reached the highest rate of women in parliament on the global scale, has edged in front of the Nordic countries which, until now, were the prime examples in this field.

One of the questions which remains central to the debate on quotas is whether their implementation allows for more than mere numerical representation, enabling women to enjoy substantial and efficient political representation. Does an increased numerical presence of women in institutions necessarily result in more favourable legislation and policies for women?

The case study on Burundi assessed the situation in the country after five years of the 30 percent female representation quota in political institutions and local governance. It questions whether this measure has allowed for an actual increase in the representation of women at all levels and whether the quotas had any impact on their advancement and emancipation.

The main points of the study are presented in the sections below.

#### 3.1 The importance of numbers: quotas allowed for a significant increase of female representation in political institutions both at the national and local level

Initially the adoption of a 30 percent female representation quota in the 2004 constitution only concerned the participation of women in decision-making bodies at the national level. As a result, the presence of women in the National Assembly increased from 20 percent during the transition period to 31.35 percent following the adoption of quotas and the 2005 general elections. In the Senate the percentage of women grew from 19.23 to 34.69 percent. Following the 2010 elections, the representation of women increased by 1.60 percent in both houses, with 32.10 percent of women in the National Assembly and 46.30 percent in the Senate. Women's representation within the government also grew, reaching 42 percent.

In contrast, the representation of women at the local level, where the idea of a 30 percent quota had not been adopted, remained very low for a long time, oscillating between 5 and 14 percent. This situation changed following the modification of the electoral code in September 2009, which for the first time allowed the extension of the 30 percent women's representation quota to community councils, expanding to the local level what had until then been a national provision.<sup>21</sup> The reform of the electoral code led to the election of 35 percent female local administrators during the May 2010 local elections. There had only been three women during the previous term. However, the quota was not extended to colline-level councils, in which the percentage of women remains low despite a slight increase from 14 to 17 percent following the September 2010 colline-level elections.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Article 181 of the Electoral Code.

<sup>22</sup> The "Colline" (and Neighbourhood) is an administrative entity. Burundi is divided in four administrative entities which are: the provinces, communes, zones, collines (and neighbourhoods). The role of the colline-level councillor is to follow up, on behalf of the population, the management of the colline's affairs, provide arbitration, mediation and conciliation services, and ensure the peaceful resolution of social and neighbourhood conflicts.



### 3.2 The increased participation of women within government institutions could have been a catalyst for the involvement of women within local decision-making bodies

According to this study, the adoption of quotas for higher-level decision-making bodies encouraged women's organisations to campaign throughout the 2005 and 2010 elections for women to run for political office at all levels, especially the local level. These campaigns had only limited success and only 14 percent of women were elected in the 2005 colline-level elections. This figure rose to 17 percent following the September 2010 colline-level elections, but this still remains extraordinarily low if one considers that Burundi is 80 percent rural and that the majority of women live in the hills.

Yes a change occurred. Women were not in a position to rule on disputes, but since we have become part of grassroots institutions, people look to us and we can now judge together with the male *Bashingantaha*.<sup>23</sup>

N, M, N, Colline-level Councillor, Gitega

However, increased female presence within lower-level decision-making bodies is an important step for women, as well as for their communities, as this has enabled certain traditions to be challenged. The election of women in colline-level elections has introduced a measure of fluidity to traditional gender roles, for instance by allowing women to perform tasks which until then had been exclusively reserved for the *Bashingantaha*.<sup>24</sup> These tasks, which provide both moral authority and prestige within the community, hold important symbolic value and include, among others, the calling and chairing of meetings within the community; taking part in the resolution of disputes; marking out the boundaries of properties following the resolution of land disputes.

More female participation in colline-level councils could also have made it possible to address certain key issues such as violence against women. The majority of people surveyed believed that women colline-level councillors played a key role in reducing domestic violence, even though this type of violence still remains high. Women victims of domestic violence know they can turn to these female councillors, considering them to be understanding, trustworthy and in a position to help curtail the impunity for perpetrators of violence.

However, the influence and importance of women in colline-level councils must be put into perspective, as they are heavily under-represented within these councils. In 2010, at least one out of three colline-level councils did not include any women among their members. The percentage of women holding the position of head of colline councils is minimal. Following the colline elections in September 2010 there were only 136 female heads of colline councils out of 2,907, accounting for little more than 4 percent overall. In a rural setting where traditions, customs and practices which discriminate against women are still very much alive, colline councils remain predominantly male institutions. Despite the efforts of some women colline councillors to fight sexual abuse, as well as practices like polygamy (officially prohibited by law), these practices remain widespread. Women colline councillors have limited room for action and do not always succeed in making their voices heard, which could lead a number of them to ultimately resign from these positions. The precarious socio-economic status of women in rural areas constitutes a major barrier to their active participation in public life. Also, the high illiteracy rate of 61.7 percent,<sup>25</sup> the lack of time due to their productive and reproductive role, as well as poverty, constitute many of the obstacles for women. Furthermore, local officials at the colline level are

23 V. Ndikumana and C. Sebudandi (2012). *Op. Cit.*, p.29

24 *Bashingantaha* are community leaders, traditionally men, chosen by the people to intervene as mediators or conciliators in family and neighbourhood disputes.

25 According to the latest general population and housing census conducted in 2008, the average level of illiteracy in Burundi was 57.7 percent: 61.7 percent for women and 53.2 percent for men.

not paid. This absence of financial compensation could be one of the factors keeping a number of women from running in colline elections.

### 3.3 The introduction of quotas and the increased presence of women in governing bodies did not necessarily lead to their effective participation in political decision making

Although it is widely acknowledged that quotas are the best way for women to set foot in politics, it is also recognised that increasing the number of women in governing bodies is not sufficient to transform the unequal relations between men and women. As a consequence, the question then arises of how women can work efficiently within governing institutions and decision-making bodies in order to gain influence in these structures. The issue of efficiency refers to the way in which women are able to influence legislation and decision-making processes, as well as formulate policies which are of high importance for gender equality.<sup>26</sup>

In Burundi, women were able to pass several important provisions favouring gender equality. For example, the 2009 reformed penal code now gives a clearer and more precise definition of rape and gender-based violence, providing a statutory basis for heavier sentences against such crimes. Women also obtained an amendment to the Penal Code, making domestic violence punishable by law.

The addition to the electoral code of a 30 percent female representation quota, the 2009 reform was an important milestone in Burundian women's struggle. We have highlighted above the positive impact this measure had for the election of a greater number of women at the local governance level. Burundi also adopted a proportional electoral system, which is more advantageous for women. Article 127 of the electoral code states that the closed electoral lists of political parties should include at least one woman for every four candidates. This better positioning of women on electoral lists allowed them to obtain better results at the 2010 general elections,<sup>27</sup> where more women were elected and fewer of them were co-opted in order to reach the required 30 percent quota, as had been the case in the 2005 elections. Indeed, women had only obtained 23 percent of the votes during the legislative election, forcing the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) to have recourse to co-optation in some constituencies, increasing the number of elected women to reach the 30 percent legal requirement. The same happened in the Senate, where only 22 percent of women were elected and eight women were co-opted to reach the 30 percent mark.<sup>28</sup>

Despite these significant gains, the study highlights that the presence of an increased number of women at the National Assembly has not helped the systematic introduction of issues relating to women and gender equality into the parliamentary debate. Women parliamentarians do not always have sufficient leeway to pass legislation favourable to women's rights.

In fact, the adoption of quotas was not accompanied by a transformation of the political and institutional systems, which continue to marginalise women. Women still have only limited access to senior roles within political parties, as the quota system does not apply to them. However, it has been highlighted that quotas only truly contribute to the effective representation of women if they are accompanied by measures ensuring that they are given political legitimacy, as well as the means to compete on the same footing as men for positions within the governing bodies

26 A. M. Goetz and S. Hassim (eds) (2003). *No shortcuts to power. African women in politics and policy making*. Zed Books: London.

27 The 2010 general elections were spread out over a period of 5 months, from May to September 2010. They concerned municipal, presidential, legislative, senatorial and colline-level elections.

28 Y. Budomo and I. Nzirorera (2006). *Op. cit.*



of political parties.<sup>29</sup> An analysis of the nine most representative Burundian political parties<sup>30</sup> shows that only three of these parties have female representation of over 30 percent within their decision-making bodies. Among these the *Alliance Démocratique pour le Renouveau* (ADR), founded and lead by a woman, boasts the highest ratio of women with a percentage of 53.9 percent.<sup>31</sup> The six other parties have female representation of under 10 percent (for two of them) and between 10 and 20 percent (for the remaining four). This lack of equitable representation denies women the necessary networks to establish their influence and power within political parties or to make their voices heard. The rhetoric that prevails among political parties to justify the low representation of women in their ranks is based on the difficulty, according to them, to find committed, qualified and experienced women with a good understanding of public policy issues to serve in their decision-making bodies. As a result, politics remains the business of men.

The membership of women in political parties is also relatively poor and the impact of a greater representation of women in decision-making bodies was not yet effectively felt in this area. One of the reasons suggested to explain this low membership of women, especially in rural areas, was their heavy domestic workload. It also appears that women do not always have freedom of choice when it comes to their membership in a political party. Men seem to have a significant degree of control over their wives' political choices, with membership in a political party often imposed by the husband. According to the survey, couples tended to be members of the same political parties, and 69 percent of the women surveyed were in the same political party as their husband. This affects the autonomy of women in terms of voting, as they generally follow their husbands' voting instructions.

Women are also disadvantaged by a complex political system, which is in part perverted by the strong influence of political and ethnic affiliations. The Arusha negotiations placed heavy emphasis on the issue of exclusion and the correction of ethnic and regional imbalances in terms of political participation. The women attending the negotiations were successful in managing that the principle of correcting gender inequality in terms of political representation was taken into account in the agreement's final draft. The implementation of these provisions lead to the adoption in the constitution of two types of representation quotas in political institutions: ethnic quotas and gender quotas. However, as underlined by the study, 'the implementation of these provisions is a difficult task as those responsible for nominations need to take into account multiple factors within the selection criteria: ethnicity, region and gender. Decision makers need to find a difficult balance between these variables'.<sup>32</sup>

Women are the first to bear the brunt of this fragile balance. The political and ethnic alliance "game" between the various power components often results in seats attributed to women in the Senate or within the government to be taken back and reassigned to men instead. It was in such a context that the former Vice-president of the Republic had to hand in her resignation to give her position to a man in 2006. Additionally, in 2007, the president of the National Assembly and the Vice-president of the Senate, both women, were removed from office and replaced by men. Out of the four women appointed as governors of a province in 2004, only two were left in 2010. Following the cabinet shuffle in January 2009, the percentage of women in office fell from 35 to 30.7 percent. This percentage increased again after the 2010 general elections, as previously mentioned. These constant fluctuations in the number of women in office weaken their efforts and are detrimental to the continuity of their action.

29 A. Dé Diop (2002). 'Les quotas en Afrique Francophone : Des débuts modestes [Quotas in French-Speaking Africa: Modest Beginnings]', in International IDEA (2002). *Les femmes au parlement : Au-delà du nombre [Women in Parliament: Beyond numbers]*. Stockholm, pp.133-142.

30 The analysis focused on 9 political parties, which are represented in parliament and are well established throughout the country.

31 The ADR political party was created by Alice Nzomukunda, former Second Vice-president of the Republic and former Vice-president of the National Assembly. She founded ADR following her resignation from parliament in 2008.

32 V. Ndikumana and C. Sebudandi (2011). *Op. cit.*, p.41.

The existing political system favours allegiances, as well as ethnical and political isolationism, which can sometimes lead politicians, including women, to adopt partisan attitudes. The study showed that ‘women parliamentarians are bound to their party’s decisions to the detriment of their support for issues concerning women’.<sup>33</sup> This was illustrated by the fact that women parliamentarians were not able to find an agreement on the creation of a unique multi-party structure and a minimal platform within which they could get together to develop a common programme to influence policy makers. As a consequence there are two separate women parliamentary organisations within the National Assembly: the Association of Burundian Women Parliamentarians (AFEPABU), which is affiliated to the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD), the party currently in power, and the Women Parliamentarian Solidarity association (SOFEPa), which gathers women parliamentarians of all the other political parties represented in the National Assembly. Furthermore, it was clear that women elected to the parliament were not all committed to promoting a programme for women, and did not have a common understanding of the promotion of women and gender equality issues. For instance, during the parliamentary debates on the bill concerning the reform of the electoral code, some women parliamentarians hesitated to support the amendment in favour of the widening of the 30 percent women representation quota in community councils.

The mistrust between civil society women’s organisations and women in political decision-making bodies contributes to reducing the latter’s margin for manoeuvre. The research report showed that relations between the two categories of women are informal, fragile and episodic. Most women active in politics have not been able to develop solid and consistent influence networks in women’s organisations from civil society, even though these are necessary for their work in parliament. Indeed, it appears that it is only when both categories of women collaborate that they are able to make progress in terms of the promotion of gender equality. This was the case when women parliamentarians collaborated with the *Association pour la Défense des Droits des Femmes* (ADDF) on the analysis of the draft of the Penal Code reform. ADDF’s amendments concerning the fight against sexual violence were supported by women parliamentarians in the National Assembly, and some of the amendments were included in the new Code. Both groups also collaborated to define the national strategy aimed at improving the participation of women in the 2010 elections and at revising the Code on inheritance, matrimonial regimes and gifts.

During the design phase of the transitional constitution, a team of women lawyers, some of whom were also politicians, gathered within the Collective of Women’s Associations and NGOs of Burundi (CAFOB) and worked independently on the first draft of the Constitution in order to analyse it from a gender perspective before sending their recommendations on to the commission responsible for the drafting of the Constitution. Their recommendations mainly concerned the adoption of a women’s representation quota in decision-making bodies, as well as the protection of fundamental women’s rights by the Constitution.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.4 Slowly but surely changing mentalities and attitudes towards the participation of women in political and public life?

The opinion poll conducted as part of the case study in Burundi revealed that the majority of respondents believed that the increased representation of women in politics through quotas was generating slow but nonetheless tangible transformations in Burundian society. According to the respondents, the presence of women at the highest level of political institutions and in decision-making bodies at the local level has had a significant psychological effect on their social

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>34</sup> S. Sabimbona. ‘Le parcours de la femme burundaise dans les processus de paix [The journey of Burundian women in the peace process]’, Session on Gender and the Transformation of Conflicts, Dushirehamwe Association, Bujumbura, 26th August 2002.

environment. 82 percent of interviewees believed that the increased representation of women had introduced positive changes in terms of gender relations and the social status of women.

One of the most emblematic alterations is the increased women's freedom of speech within the public sphere in a context where continuing, deeply ingrained traditions restrict women's voices, confining them to the private sphere. The perception is that the right, now enjoyed by women, to make their voices heard in the political sphere, has contributed to giving more freedom of speech to women in general. This newly acquired right to speak has significantly contributed to women's increased self-confidence, especially in terms of their participation in political and public life. Furthermore, elected women, particularly in community and colline-level councils, now draw greater legitimacy from their elective office, which helps increase their social status and moral authority within their communities.

Despite these positive developments, it is important to distinguish between these perceptions and the actual status and situation of women in Burundian society, taking into account the major challenges they continue to face. Further in-depth studies are necessary in order to truly assess the role and place of quotas among the various factors which contribute to increasing women's empowerment in Burundi. Many interviewees, for instance, underlined the influence of women's organisations, especially income-generating associations, as a key aspect which contributed to increased women's empowerment, particularly at the economic level. Women's associations, which flourished throughout all levels of Burundian society following the 1933 political crisis and the civil war that followed, are perceived as a melting pot for interaction, learning about democracy and the freedom to speak. They played a crucial role in raising the awareness of women of civil and political life, as well as facilitating their empowerment.

## 4. Promoting gender equality in the decentralisation process and in local governance: the example of Rwanda

Since 2000, the government in Rwanda has gradually adopted a national policy of administrative, political and financial decentralisation. The principal aim of this decentralisation policy has been to promote participatory democracy by strengthening the power and political capabilities of local communities so that they can be part of the efforts to reduce poverty and to favour national reconciliation. The Rwandan authorities also perceive decentralisation as a mechanism to mobilise energies, initiatives and resources in order to reach the goals set by Vision 2020<sup>35</sup> and to promote sustainable development.

The type of decentralisation chosen by Rwanda implies a power transfer to lower levels of government, as well as the transfer of more independence in terms of decision making and local financial management. This decentralisation policy was carried out via six types of administrative entities and at two government levels: central and local. This administrative structure is briefly presented in the table below.

### Administrative structure of decentralisation in Rwanda

Central Government Level	
Central Government	Formulates policies and supports local government in terms of capacity reinforcement (monitoring and evaluation of programmes) and at the financial level
Provinces	Their role is to align the planning of the development of districts with national policies and programmes, as well as to oversee the implementation of national policies within districts.
Local Government Level: Decentralised Bodies	
Districts	Independent bodies at the administrative and financial level, these are the central platforms of the decentralisation policy. Districts are responsible, amongst others, for the implementation of policies adopted by the central government, for the design and operation of development programmes, as well as for the provision of services to the communities belonging to the decentralised bodies. They are also perceived as centres for socio-economic development and the promotion of participatory democracy.
Sectors	Responsible for the provision of various basic services to citizens and districts. The sectors analyse the needs of communities and define development plans in a participatory manner.
Cells	Mobilisation and development bodies, where basic services are provided. They are the coordination interface between sectors and villages.
Villages	Administrative level at which citizens participate directly in all issues related to their village and where they address interpersonal disputes. These are also units for the mobilisation of citizens.

The case study on Rwanda, which was conducted in five districts from the country's four provinces, as well as the city of Kigali,<sup>36</sup> reviewed the implementation of decentralisation in order to understand how gender equality issues had been integrated. The study also showed the impact of women's participation in local governance on gender equality.

Decentralisation and the implied delegation of the central government's authority and responsibilities to local government bodies is often perceived by many practitioners from the development field

<sup>35</sup> Rwanda's national development plan.

<sup>36</sup> These districts and provinces include: Rulingo (Northern Province); Nyamagabe (Southern Province); Gasabo (City of Kigali); Karongi (Western Province); Gatsibo (Eastern Province).

as an opportunity for the promotion of women's rights and women's increased participation in local governance. It is argued that the presence of women in local governance gives them more access to resources and, therefore, control of them. However, for women and men to be part of the decentralisation process on an equal footing, it is necessary to align the policy and strategies of its implementation with the aim of gender equality.<sup>37</sup> It has also been underlined that it is easier to integrate gender matters into the decentralisation process when the concerned country already has a national gender equality policy in place with clear guidelines concerning the implementation of this policy, as this would facilitate its transmission to the local level.

Rwanda is credited with a strong national policy, which promotes gender equality and the participation of women in decision making. The key role played by women in the reconstruction of the country following the civil war and the 1994 genocide, as well as the sustained advocacy conducted by women's CSOs in favour of reforms aimed at improving the status of women, were determining factors in the government's political will to promote increased gender equality. An arsenal of legal provisions and a number of institutional mechanisms have been gradually set up since 1994; these include the Ministry of Gender and Family Protection, the national committee for the monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Platform, the National Council on Women (CNF)<sup>38</sup> and the Gender Observatory.<sup>39</sup> The principle of gender equality was introduced in the Rwanda Vision 2020, adopted in 2000,<sup>40</sup> and various laws were reviewed to remove any provisions discriminating against women. Examples among the most significantly revised laws include the bill on inheritance, matrimonial regimes and gifts, which allows for widows and orphans of the genocide to inherit from their spouses and fathers, which was not previously the case<sup>41</sup>; the land reform bill adopted in 2005, which grants equal land ownership rights to men and women; the 2008 bill on sexual violence, which lists the penalties incurred by perpetrators of such violence and criminalises domestic violence.

The women who took an active part in the drafting of the transitional constitution adopted in 2001 were successful in having a 30 percent women's representation quota for all levels of decision making included in the draft. This provision was kept in the post-transition Constitution of 2003, which also includes a number of articles reaffirming women's right to full-fledged citizenship. Currently, with 56 percent women, the Rwandan Parliament boasts the world's highest female representation rate.

The government has shown its determination to promote gender in decentralisation policy and has already adopted a number of measures to that effect. However, research has shown that the Rwandan decentralisation process has not really been successful in providing women with sufficient room to influence the policies defined and implemented at the local governance level. Taking gender equality and female representation into account faces major challenges, the more important of which are presented and analysed below.

## 4.1 The participation of women in decision-making positions in decentralised bodies is limited and uneven

The 30 percent women representation quota in decision making at all levels adopted by the 2003 constitution was not systematically applied at the local governance level, where women's involvement remained low for a long time. To correct this situation, a specific piece of legislation

37 GTZ (2001). *Décentralisation – Guide sur la prise en charge de la dimension genre* [Decentralisation: Guide on implementing a gender dimension]. GTZ: Eschborn.

38 Founded in 2003, the CNF is a consultation forum for Rwandan women concerning their participation in the country's development. All Rwandan women are expected to be affiliates of the CNF and to participate in its activities within their respective entities.

39 Founded in 2008, the Gender Observatory has a mandate to monitor the implementation of national gender policy and to measure the progress made in the field of gender equality promotion.

40 Vision 2020 is the Rwandan government's master plan aiming, among others, to establish the rule of law in Rwanda, as well as good governance, to promote a strong economy, to develop the private sector, and to modernise agriculture and farming.

41 Following the war and genocide in 1994, women heads of households were estimated at 34 percent, 29 percent of whom were widows.

was passed in 2006 requiring that 30 percent of the members of district, cell and sector councils were to be women. In effect, these measures contributed to an increase in women's participation, which has now reached 30 percent in these bodies, particularly in district councils.

However, women's participation is significantly diminishing in higher-level local government positions and in the key roles where policies are adopted and implemented. The five districts covered by the survey did not have any women serving in key positions, such as town mayor or executive secretary, despite the fact that women accounted for 40 percent of staff in the offices and councils of these districts. Additionally, the ten sectors registered within these five districts had no women serving as executive secretaries. The only level at which women served in decision-making positions in these five districts was at the lowest level, where 17 percent of the executive secretaries of cells were women.

Preconceptions on the inability of women to serve in leadership roles are still rooted at the local community level and most women are limited to positions, which are mere extensions of their traditional roles and reflect the gender division of labour. For example, 80 percent of vice-mayors for social affairs positions were occupied by women in the five surveyed districts against only 20 percent for the position of vice-mayor for economic affairs and planning.<sup>42</sup>

According to the survey, this poor representation of women in decision-making bodies is also linked in part to the fact that the decentralisation strategy document did not systematically analyse the situation and status of women, or the obstacles to their participation as citizens. Discussions lead in focus groups during the field study highlighted practical issues which affect women's participation and discourage them from running for office or being elected to these positions. This is indeed the case for the position of sector executive secretary, which requires long working hours and frequent motorbike travel. Furthermore, most of these positions require a change of residence and the majority of women interviewed said that few men were willing to move with their wives. Lack of time was also a significant constraint. Indeed, most positions at the lower levels of local governance are volunteer posts, a fact that limits the participation of women, who already have significant workloads due to their productive and reproductive roles. They are required to take part in the activities of multiple committees, which requires a significant time investment.

## 4.2 The integration of gender into the planning and budgeting of development plans and programmes for decentralised bodies remains poor

One of the justifications for decentralisation put forward by the Rwandan authorities is to enable people to take part in the planning and management of their development. Advocates of decentralisation consider that transferring the planning of development to local communities offers great potential to adapt development initiatives to the needs and interests of the various groups and social categories, in particular the most vulnerable. It is also assumed that an equal participation of men and women in development programmes cannot be reached by establishing separate women's components in the decentralisation process. On the contrary, the entire process needs to be strategically orientated following gender equality principles.<sup>43</sup>

The authorities in charge of decentralisation in Rwanda seem, in theory, to agree with this argument. Indeed, the guidelines for the planning of development strategies for decentralised bodies include a gender mainstreaming perspective and its acknowledgement during all steps of the planning process. Despite these guidelines, the study highlighted the fact that the taking into

42 At the national level, only 7 percent of district mayors, 13 percent of deputies in charge of district economic affairs, 17 percent of district executive secretaries and 13 percent of sector executive secretaries were women.

43 GTZ (2001). *Op. Cit.*



account of gender and the inclusion of gender analysis designed to identify priorities for each focus area were quite limited in planning processes. Furthermore, there is a mismatch between the instructions and responsibilities given to decentralised bodies in this respect, and the financial means and technical expertise made available to them in order to carry out their mission properly.

Indeed, both the technical staff in charge of planning at the district level and members of advisory bodies have very limited abilities and expertise in the field of gender mainstreaming in development planning. The planning guidelines, which require local bodies to mainstream gender into every stage of planning, do not provide any tools or explanations as to how this should be done. Discussions in focus groups with the technical staff and members of advisory bodies in the surveyed districts and sectors revealed the poor understanding of the concept of gender and gender mainstreaming, which in most cases were simply limited to the promotion of women and the empowerment of women through training. The gender approach is mostly integrated following a sector approach rather than a cross-cutting approach. As a consequence in the two districts where the survey was carried out, elements of a gender analysis were only integrated in development plans for the health, family promotion and child protection sectors. The few districts which were able to properly mainstream gender in their development plans were those which benefited from external technical expertise provided by consultants working on development projects funded externally in their area.<sup>44</sup>

Technical abilities to develop gender indicators are also limited, even though the monitoring and evaluation process requires decentralised bodies to submit reports on the results of their activities, which include gender indicators. The study underlined that the indicators generated focused exclusively on quantitative aspects such as numbers of women or of other beneficiaries of interventions. Another challenge is that there is very little expertise at the national level to establish gender indicators, which could assist districts with their planning. The ministries of education and health seem to be the only ones which have established such gender indicators.

In terms of budget planning, the ministry of finance requires districts to carry out a gender budget analysis. Here as well, staff members face technical difficulties, preventing them from establishing budgets which integrate gender equality-related priorities. Capacity building for staff is lacking. In each of the surveyed districts only the head of planning, the woman representative of the CNF and the youth representative were given brief gender budgeting training. High turnover among few trained staff members undermines capacity-building efforts. In three of the visited districts, the trained planners had left the district. One of the problems is the lack of expertise in terms of gender budgeting at the national level. A UN Women-funded "Gender Budgeting" project was set up in the budgeting department of the ministry of finance to help better mainstream gender equality in budgeting processes. Four other ministries were also selected as pilot sites to benefit from this expertise. However, this expertise has not always been transferred to decentralised bodies.

**Citizens' control of public action remains too poor to influence the planning and budgeting process with gender perspectives. The CNF, as well as gender equality promoting CSOs operating in decentralised units, lack the technical and financial means to act as a catalyst for gender analysis and advocacy.<sup>45</sup>**

Discussions in focus groups and interviews have shown that women have very little influence on planning and budgeting processes, even though these are highly political processes during which

<sup>44</sup> One example, for instance, is the Programme Supporting Local Governance in the Rural Areas of Rwanda (PAGOR) funded by Canada, which supported the Nyamagabe district in Southern Province in terms of gender analysis and its mainstreaming in the planning, implementation and monitoring of projects.

<sup>45</sup> I. Mukankubito and J.D. Mihigo (2011). *Intégration du genre dans les processus de décentralisation: leçons du Rwanda [Integration of gender into the decentralisation process: lessons from Rwanda]*. International Alert & EASSI: London/Kampala, p.30.

the interests and priorities of various social groups are negotiated.<sup>46</sup> Women, who are poorly represented in this process, are badly placed to assert and pursue their priorities. It emerged from the discussions that, due to their lack of adequate training, female staff involved with the planning and budgeting of local development plans and programmes did not always have an appropriate understanding of the issues at stake or of the importance of considering gender issues. Women leaders and members of district and sector councils do not have sufficient room to manoeuvre to influence decisions. The people surveyed suggested that women leaders could have more negotiating strength within councils if they collaborated more closely and exchanged more information among themselves and the branches of the CNF, which is active in local communities. Indeed, these branches, which work closely with women, are aware of their practical needs and priorities, and could relay this information to women leaders so that they could ensure they are taken into account in the planning and budgeting of district development plans.

The study, however, showed that organisations such as the Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities, as well as several CSOs and the CNF, were getting more and more involved in the strengthening of the expertise of technical staff and of elected representatives of decentralised bodies to better mainstream gender perspectives. It also appeared that, in some cases, women were able to induce on-off changes relating to specific activities during the validation of plans and budgets. However, these cases are very scarce.

#### **4.3 There are more women than men in public participation forums at the cell and village level, but they speak less often and do not get too involved in the discussions held or decisions taken**

Public participation forums are a mechanism which was established at all levels of local governance in order to enable people to take part in the strategic planning and selection of development priorities and the definition, implementation and monitoring of development programmes in their entities. Taking part in these forums is individual and directed at the lower levels of local government such as sectors, cells and villages. At higher levels, in district and sector councils, this participation becomes indirect and is carried out by elected representatives. The study tried to gain a better understanding of the nature of women's participation in public participation fora and their influence on decisions taken in these fora.

Most of the people interviewed had reservations about indirect civic participation through elected representatives. It was pointed out that these representatives were often cut off from their communities, with which they rarely consulted due to insufficient material and financial means to organise meetings. In contrast, individual and direct civic participation at the lower levels of governance was considered by 90 percent of interviewees as a much better mechanism to ensure the free expression of the people concerned. Meetings held at the local community level bring together participants who know each other, share the same environment and face common problems. Locally elected representatives come from the community and continue to live there. This provides an atmosphere of confidence which is suitable for frank and open discussion.

The presence of women in the public participation fora of cells and villages is much higher than that of men. This is due to the fact that there are more women than men in rural areas, with men more affected by urban migration. Despite their strong numerical presence in local participation fora, women express themselves less frequently than men and take only a small part in the discussions held and the decisions taken. One of the reasons suggested to explain this silence lay in the traditions still deeply rooted in rural areas, which require women to remain silent in the presence of men. However, the situation in urban and semi-urban areas is different, with women generally expressing themselves more freely during meetings. It also seems that women express

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<sup>46</sup> GTZ (2001). *Op. cit.*



themselves more freely in the branches of the CNF; however, these branches do not always have sufficient financial means to organise meetings and to maintain relations with CNF delegates at the district level.

Discussions also revealed that the most common gender equality issues discussed in public participation fora in the five surveyed districts were combating violence against women and family planning. Gender-based violence, which remains a major issue, especially in rural areas, came up as a priority: this has been included in the programmes of all decentralised entities and is monitored. Committees have been established to register cases of gender-based violence and to report them to the relevant authorities, as well as to assist victims. However, limited financial means and the lack of expertise in terms of specialised trauma counselling, combined with the loaded work agendas of local authorities, constitute constraints which prevent efficient assistance to victims.

Most of the people surveyed felt that the decentralisation process facilitated the participation of women and a greater acceptance of their presence in decision making at the local level. According to interviewees, the main barrier to the expression of women in public participation fora was due to women's lack of confidence in themselves. Nevertheless, the study clearly showed that gender equality was not yet fully mainstreamed in the decentralisation process, despite the political will of the Rwandan government.

*'Achievements to date are mainly the result of national policies and measures taken to promote gender equality at the national level, rather than a result of the gender responsiveness of elected representatives and local government technicians'.<sup>47</sup>*

According to certain analysts, one of the challenges set by political decentralisation is to determine under which conditions it could promote women's causes and create participation and gender-differentiated access to services and resources.<sup>48</sup> Decentralisation processes have political programmes with priorities which need to be defined and negotiated. In view of this, it is necessary to establish social dialogue with clearly defined guidelines and participants, as well as clear and transparent representation and accountability processes, in order to ensure that women are included in negotiation processes as full-fledged participants.<sup>49</sup> Decentralisation processes can be an efficient tool for the increased representation of women, especially for women from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds, provided they are the result of an endogenous and consultative process founded on the people's need to be heard, and that they are supported by social and economic policies which promote democracy, local development, transparency and community dialogue.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>48</sup> M. MacLean (2003). *Elaboration d'un programme de recherche sur les dimensions de genre et la décentralisation : document d'information pour le concours de recherche 2003 de la Section de l'égalité entre les sexes du CRDI* [Elaboration of a research programme on the dimensions of gender and decentralisation : Information note for the 2003 research office of the Gender Equality Section]. IDRC: Ottawa.

<sup>49</sup> UNIFEM and VADO/WAVE. 'Rethinking gender, democracy and development: is decentralisation a tool for local effective political voice?' Ferrara, Bologna, Modena, 20th-22nd May 2001.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. Women in electoral processes: the 2006 presidential and legislative, national and provincial elections in DRC

The first presidential and legislative elections to take place in DRC in over thirty years were held in 2006.<sup>51</sup> These elections were an important landmark in Congolese political life, in which women's organisations played an active role. The political liberalisation conducted by president Mobutu in the 1990s under the pressure of the international community encouraged the emergence of a women's movement pushing for more women's representation in public life. However, the women's movement really took off during the war period and the major economic crisis that the country experienced starting in 1996. 90 percent of the associations for women's rights were created between 1998 and 2004.

The case study on DRC conducted in the city-province of Kinshasa and in the province of South Kivu analysed the participation of Congolese women in the 2006 election to establish whether it had led to increased women's participation in public life. It identified and discussed socio-cultural, political and economic factors, as well as mechanisms ensuring the perpetuation of women's political participation.

### 5.1 The active participation of women in the electoral process did not lead to an increase in the number of women in political institutions

Women took part in the elections as electors, candidates and observers. Organisations such as *Dynamique des Femmes Politiques* (DYNAFEP) and *Cadre permanent de concertation de la femme Congolaise* (CAFCO) in Kinshasa as well as the *Caucus des Femmes du Sud-Kivu pour la Paix*,<sup>52</sup> the *Association des Femmes des Médias du Sud Kivu* (AFEM-SK) and the *Action pour la Paix et le Développement Endogène* (ADEPAE) in South Kivu played a key role in mobilising women's votes, promoting women candidates and recruiting women monitors of the electoral process. Sustained advocacy was conducted with political parties and government authorities for more women to be included on electoral lists and for a reform of the electoral code to add the principle of gender parity, as was already the case in the Constitution.

This sustained mobilisation effort did not bear fruit, despite the fact that, at the national scale, more women voted than men. Indeed, they accounted for 64 percent of the country's electorate for the legislative elections. In the city-province of Kinshasa and South Kivu province they accounted for 50.6 percent and 54.5 percent of voters respectively. On the other hand, the percentage of women running for office was very low. Among the candidates, there were only 12 percent of women running for office in the presidential election, 13.6 percent in the legislative elections and 9 percent in the senatorial election. The percentage of elected women was also low: 0 percent in the presidential election, 8.6 percent in the National Assembly and 4.6 percent in the Senate. These results represented a decline compared to the previous period, during which female representation was 12 percent in the transitional National Assembly, when women had been co-opted by political parties.<sup>53</sup> The four women out of the 33 candidates in the presidential election only obtained a combined 1.35 percent of the vote. They were defeated in their own provinces of origin by male candidates from other provinces. The government team put together after the election, and those that followed after a succession of four ministerial reshufflings between 2006 and 2011, all had a low ratio of women, with an average of 11.5 percent.

51 National presidential and legislative elections were held in November and December 2011. Provincial legislative elections to elect representatives for provincial parliaments will be organised in 2013.

52 South Kivu Women's Caucus for Peace.

53 The transitional National Assembly served from 2003 to 2006. The assembly was an unelected body composed of the various parties which had participated in the ICD in Sun City.

The results of the legislative elections in the provincial parliaments were even lower. Representation within provincial assemblies is the result of two different voting systems: on the one hand, direct universal suffrage and, on the other hand, co-optation via indirect elections by provincial deputies. In South Kivu only two women out of eighty-four candidates were elected through direct universal suffrage, and a third woman was co-opted. By the end of the electoral process the South Kivu provincial assembly was comprised of 33 parliamentarians, only three of whom were women. Among the factors explaining this poor performance of women, the study emphasised the existence of political and electoral systems which did not facilitate the participation of women. In addition, women lack political experience, financial means and the mobilising power to build a strong and reliable electoral base.

The elections were held in a context of war and political instability, particularly in the east of the country. According to the study, the electoral campaign was conducted following a “transactional electoral campaign” model typified by ethnic manipulation, political patronage and vote buying, all of which were detrimental to the clear and accurate formulation of social programmes by the various candidates. Women, even though they account for the majority of the electorate, did not vote for women candidates and it is estimated that close to 78 percent of women gave their vote to male candidates. In South Kivu this percentage reached 82 percent. In rural areas, for instance, women primarily voted based on ethnicity and voting instructions given by men from their ethnic group, clan, community or family. The networks developed by women's organisations to attain women's votes in favour of female candidates were not able to serve as a counterweight. Women have also been criticised for approaching the election in a disorganised manner instead of uniting themselves around the candidates who had the best chances of being elected.

## 5.2 The determinants of women's participation in political and public life are simultaneously socio-economic, institutional and cultural

The study exposed the still significant impact of patriarchal traditional customs and practices, especially within rural communities, the majority of which do not confer any political role to women. The uneven nature of gender relations and socialisation constitute the basis of discrimination against women in the public space. The traditional prohibition of women from speaking in public and the persistence of early marriages, which prematurely end the schooling of young girls, appear to be some of the many factors limiting the participation of women. Religious institutions are bastions of conservatism in terms of the role of women in the public sphere. Admittedly, the Catholic Church organised activities to promote the political education of women during the 2006 elections, but most of DRC's many revivalist Churches did not follow this path and in fact advocated the submission of women, who are not allowed to speak during their assemblies. Those Churches, which promote a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible's teachings and a hierarchical understanding of gender relations among their faithful, are very powerful agents of socialisation in DRC, where more than 95 percent of the population is Christian.

Low levels of education among the vast majority of women and high illiteracy represent a hindrance for women. At the national level, the illiteracy rate among women reaches 40 percent, compared to 15 percent of men. This ratio varies according to place of residence and social environment. 58 percent of women from rural areas are illiterate, against 19 percent in urban areas. The Kinshasa province, which is the country's most favoured province, shows much higher schooling rates: 92 percent for women and 96 percent for men. These inequalities have an impact on the political representation of women. Indeed, an analysis of the provinces from which those women elected to the National Assembly originate, shows that the majority of them, 17.2 percent, come from the city-province of Kinshasa, which, as previously mentioned, has high levels of schooling for girls, and is also the place where efforts in terms of the promotion of women have been the most sustained. Most of the programmes to prepare women for the electoral process concentrated themselves in Kinshasa to the detriment of other provinces and rural areas. The rich mining

province of Katanga comes in second place, with a rate of 13 percent of women originating from this province. In contrast, only 3.1 percent of parliamentary women come from South Kivu.

As was the case in neighbouring Burundi, women have been penalised by the anti-democratic nature of the political and electoral systems. Most of the political parties did not encourage women to run for office. The principle of parity inscribed in the Constitution is not reflected in electoral law and has not been adopted by political parties, for instance in terms of the composition of electoral lists. Their representatives in the National Assembly rejected the proposal for the adoption of closed and zebra electoral lists,<sup>54</sup> which are more conducive to the election of women than open lists. On the other hand, the membership of women in political parties and their participation in governing bodies remain low. At the time of the 2006 elections, only nine women led a political party out of the 267 parties in the country. However, political party leaders are those who campaigned and stood for election. Many of the women candidates joined political parties after the electoral process had already started and without any preparation. However, most of the women candidates ran as independents, which significantly reduced their chances of being elected. 95.4 percent of women elected to the National Assembly were members of political parties, compared to a mere 4.6 percent of independent female candidates.

The survey highlights the low level of politicisation among women, some of which consider the participation of women in politics to be a “social deviance”.<sup>55</sup> Out of 147 interviewed women, 106 said they were in favour of more female representation in the political arena; however, they felt that women getting involved with politics were less available and neglected their duties as spouses and mothers, thus defying the social standards of marriage. As a consequence, politics has become the concern of women willing to live outside of established social standards.

The low level of women’s politicisation was also highlighted by their poor knowledge and limited ownership of national and international legal instruments for the promotion of women and gender equality. The most well-known legal text is the DRC Constitution, especially Article 14, which establishes the principle of gender parity for representation in national, provincial and local institutions. The Constitution was quoted by over 90 percent of the 108 interviewed women leaders from civil society and politics. This rate is significantly smaller when it comes to international instruments, with only 32.4 percent of interviewees knowing about CEDAW and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and 4.2 percent aware of Resolution 1820. Women nonetheless actively participated in developing national legal dispositions in favour of gender equality. It is thanks to the collective mobilisation and intense advocacy efforts among women from civil society and politicians that the principle of parity could be integrated into the Constitution. A significant amount of work between both groups was also undertaken in order to review the Family Code, which contains numerous provisions which discriminate against women.

The limited economic power of most Congolese women was also stated as a determinant of their political participation. Out of 45 women interviewed in Kinshasa with influence in the political and social spheres, 39 suggested the lack of appropriate financial means as the most important factor in the participation of women in the elections. For example, the non-refundable deposit required from candidates for the presidential election was USD50,000. Furthermore, the country’s vast territory and the isolation of numerous constituencies had a strong impact on campaigning costs, which required substantial financial means which most candidates did not have at their disposal. This contributed to reducing the mobilisation power of women and disconnected them from potential electoral support bases.

54 The closed and zebra electoral list system is a kind of proportional representation whereby electors chose a party and its list of candidates to represent them. Closed and zebra lists are particularly efficient for women if political parties place them high enough in the lists or alternate men and women following a zebra striped pattern where every other stripe represents a woman.

55 C. Odimba, P.R. Namegabe and J. Baseke (2011). *Op. cit.*, p.15.

### 5.3 Despite some progress, the Congolese legal and legislative framework still contains numerous laws and dispositions which discriminate against women, and limit their participation in public life

A number of measures were taken at the legal and institutional level to secure the participation of women and the gender equality principle. In practice, however, they had little impact.

The creation in 2003 of a ministry of gender, the idea of which had been included in the Global and All-inclusive Agreement, met one of women's main demands during the Sun City peace talks. It appears, however, that this ministry's tasks are difficult to implement due to the limited financial means at its disposal, and high staff turnover which prevents continuity.

In Article 14 of the Third Republic's Constitution adopted in February 2006, it asserts gender parity within national, provincial and local institutions and guarantees its implementation within said institutions. The bill on parity was adopted by the National Assembly, but the mechanisms allowing its institutionalisation were never implemented. Parity is neither respected in elective institutions nor in government. It was not taken into account in the composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which only counts one woman among its seven members. Following the adoption of the bill, the CAFCO coordinator declared that 'the most difficult part still lays ahead, as its implementation is mainly dependent on the will of men, who represent the majority in all institutions'.<sup>56</sup>

Political parties represented in parliament still put up fierce resistance against the reform of electoral laws which aim to integrate parity. Women's organisations have tried in vain since 2006 to amend Article 13 of the electoral law, which is dedicated to the composition of electoral lists. Article 13 specifies that failure to implement gender parity when composing electoral lists is not a valid reason for their inadmissibility. Women's organisations, which are mobilised to implement parity, argue that this article is a violation of the Constitution, which states the principle of parity in Article 14. During parliamentary debates on the reform of the electoral code in 2001, deputies refused to change Article 13 of the electoral law, arguing that one could not prevent a political party from participating in the electoral process merely because it did not list enough women on its electoral list.

The under-representation of women in the political arena following the elections in DRC is due to political culture and training issues, low levels of education and financial autonomy, as well as social standards which structure gender relations and have an influence on the perception that women themselves and the communities to which they belong have of the participation of women in political life in general.<sup>57</sup>

The strong resistance met by parity within Congolese society and the issues at stake in its implementation are typified by the opinion of a Catholic priest interviewed in Goma, North Kivu, who expressed his fear that the implementation of parity could undermine the family institution 'by generating confusion in terms of gender equality within families'.<sup>58</sup>

The Family Code, the Labour Code and the Penal Code all contain multiple provisions which discriminate against women. The Family Code contains provisions whereby married women are subjected to the guardianship of their husbands. The Code establishes husbands as the head of the family, whom women must obey. Married women still require marital authorisation for certain

56 E. Chaco, 'La loi sur la parité est-elle une avancée réelle pour les femmes? [Does the law on parity constitute real progress for women?]', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, Kinshasa, 18th April 2011.

57 C. Odimba, P.R. Namegabe and J. Baseke (2011). *Op. cit.*, p.51.

58 *Ibid.*

administrative acts such as opening a bank account, finalising a transaction or to go to court regarding civil matters. A revision of the Family Code has been under way for several years in order to repeal some of these provisions, which violate the human rights of women and support the inequality of gender relations. As highlighted by the study, a reform of Congolese law appears to be necessary. This reform should include the harmonisation of national laws with international legal instruments, the repeal of laws which discriminate against women and the establishment of new laws which effectively integrate a gender dimension.



## 6. The economic dimension of women's political action: the role of women in building a peace economy in northern Uganda

The issue of economic power is central to the analysis of women's participation in politics. The lack of access to resources and control thereof has been identified as one of the major obstacles to the political participation of women and it is often argued that an increased empowerment of women from an economic perspective would play a role in increasing their participation in the political sphere.

This case study was conducted in northern Uganda, which went through a bloody conflict that lasted for over 20 years. This conflict had devastating economic consequences in the region, caused the destruction of economic infrastructure and resulted in high casualties. Despite the breakdown in peace negotiations between the government and the armed rebellion in 2008, the war seems to have stopped and relative peace has been restored. Northern Uganda has since embarked on a reconstruction and economic recovery process in which women have played a key role. The study focused on the Gulu and Lira districts, located in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions respectively. It analysed the opportunities with which the post-conflict period presented women from an economic perspective, and determined the impact of those opportunities in terms of the empowerment of women within households, as well as in terms of their political participation at the community and local governance level.

### 6.1 The war forced women to diversify their economic activities, allowing them to escape the narrow context of the domestic economy

The war, which destroyed a large portion of the region's economic and social fabric, led to important changes in the sexual division of labour and the economic activity of women. Before the war, there was a fairly clearly defined sexual division of labour, which confined the economic activities of women to the narrow framework of the domestic economy. Indeed, in the rural areas in which most women lived they primarily dealt with food crop production for family consumption from a subsistence economy perspective. A small portion of this production was sold in local markets in order to earn a little money with which they could buy basic products such as salt, oil or soap. Women living in urban areas were more involved in small trade, but here also only to satisfy the family's needs. One of the other rare products commercialised by women was the local beer they would brew themselves. Cash crops, on the other hand, especially cotton and tobacco farming, which generated most households' monetary income, lay entirely in the hands of men. Despite the fact that women would participate as family labour in production processes, they did not play any role in the commercialisation process of cash crops, which was exclusively controlled by men.

The devastation caused by many years of war changed this traditional order. A large portion of the rural population was forced to abandon agricultural activities due to insecurity. They had to find refuge in camps for displaced people, causing a drastic fall in the region's production capacity. The war and the long years spent in camps introduced significant changes to the sexual division of labour and gender roles. Many men died during the war or left the region. The war had a discouraging effect on men, who lost the resources which allowed them to fulfil their traditional role as provider of the family. Many slipped into depression and alcoholism. In the absence of men, women had to take on new responsibilities, assuming the support of their families entirely. The war resulted in a high number of widows, who, *de facto*, became heads of households. However, the study showed that, even in households where both spouses were present, husbands generally contributed very little, if at all, to the family's expenses, which in most cases were

entirely taken on by women. The discussions in focus groups and individual in-depth interviews clearly showed that, even though women also suffered during the war, they generally adapted themselves better than men to the new conditions and disruptions in everyday life caused by lengthy stays in displaced persons camps, where they formed the majority. Life in the camps, which rapidly developed some characteristics of urban centres dependent on the principle of supply and demand, offered women opportunities to diversify their economic activities and gave them the possibility to leave the narrow framework of the domestic economy to which they had been confined before.

One of the major changes was women's progressive involvement in activities generating monetary income, which they needed in order to fulfil their new roles as family providers. They began to commercialise fruits and vegetables, which were traditionally not commercialised, but were very much needed in the camps. They continued to brew and sell the local beer, which became their main source of income. Some of them got involved with catering, opening canteens, while others developed kiosks selling various products or supplying services to the building sites within the camps. Tontine systems developed in the camps allowed women to obtain small loans they could reinvest in their businesses. The difficult living conditions in the camps contributed to the development of new kinds of relatively lucrative commercial activities, such as selling humanitarian aid products (corn flour, beans, oil and cooking utensils), in which women got involved.

Considered to be a vulnerable group by the humanitarian agencies and development NGOs working in refugee camps, women were given specific guidance and assistance by these organisations. They benefited from programmes of income-generating activities to improve their livelihoods, as well as from training in various fields, including women's rights, which contributed to their increased awareness of their role in the public sphere. As a consequence, despite its devastating impact, the war offered opportunities which women were able to seize. The change in their traditional roles, their long stays in camps and their increased visibility in the economic sphere allowed them to gain more awareness of their role in the public sphere and to develop a spirit of entrepreneurship. This allowed them to contribute significantly to the region's economic recovery after more than twenty years of war.

## 6.2 Women seized economic opportunities offered in the post-conflict period, becoming key economic actors in the process

With the return of displaced populations to rural areas, women returned to their agricultural activities in practically the same proportion as during the pre-war period. However, the great novelty was their considerably increased participation in the trading sector. They now account for the majority of merchants in markets and have transformed the nature of commerce in the region by launching the commercialisation of food crops, which did not exist before the war, when only cash crops such as cotton and tobacco were commercialised. They control the trade of food crops in high demand, such as cereals, fruits and vegetables, as well as fish and second-hand clothing. They are also involved in cross-border commerce and sell their products in Juba, South Sudan, and in Tanzania. Women also added a new dimension to their commercial activities by establishing joint ventures, allowing them to increase the size of their businesses, to reduce operating costs and to be in a better position to compete for calls for tender as well as to gain access to credit.

**'In Gulu the fish market is controlled by women. There are three groups of women controlling the sector and it has become impossible to break into this market'.<sup>59</sup>**

<sup>59</sup> J. Ahikire, A. Madanda and C. Ampaire (2011). *Post-war economic opportunities and the implications for women's political participation and empowerment in northern Uganda*. International Alert/EASSI: London/Kampala, p.32.



Apart from this breakthrough in food product trade, women have increased their presence in other sectors with which they had started to get involved in the camps, such as small restaurants and catering, which they now almost entirely control. Furthermore, some of them have benefited from the region's reconstruction and development initiatives launched by private companies in the commercial farming sector. In the Lira district, for instance, some women farmers formed groups allowing them to sign contracts with oil production companies, to which they provide the raw materials for the manufacturing of certain types of vegetable oils, such as sunflower oil or soya bean oil. These contracts are particularly profitable for women as the companies support them in order to obtain land plots in which to grow crops, and by providing them with seeds, fertilisers and technical support. These companies also help them sell their products. Similar initiatives were launched in Gulu district for coffee production; there again the sector is dominated by groups of women farmers.

The study showed that women tendered for contracts made by local government. This is an entirely new phenomenon which did not exist prior to the war. Women generally tender for contracts concerning routine road maintenance or the management of markets. This has led to a greater number of women than men winning calls to tender for the management markets during the 2008-2009 fiscal year in Gulu district. Additionally, 78 percent of service providers for the maintenance of link roads were women. However, the study also showed that women only tender for this type of small contracts, as they did not have sufficient capital to compete for more substantial calls for tender.

Nonetheless, women are more involved in the financial sector, which has grown significantly. Before the war there were only two commercial banks in Gulu and four in Lira. Now, after the war, there are nine in Gulu and ten in Lira, and women have been able to open accounts in local banks. However, they find it hard to obtain loans from the larger commercial banks as they are not able to provide sufficient guarantees. For this reason, women turn to micro-finance institutions and cooperatives such as SACCOs,<sup>60</sup> which specialise in giving credit and in savings. Women account for most SACCO members, which flourished after the war and have become one of the main institutions granting loans to women.

This breakthrough of women in some sectors of the economy has had a substantial impact on families and communities. The role of women as the main breadwinner, which appeared during the war period, has intensified with the end of the conflict. Women, who have the entire responsibility for the running of their families, are not only the many widows who are heads of family by default, but more and more often they are also married women who have ended up with more income than their husbands. The in-depth interviews and discussions in focus groups conducted during the survey highlighted the fact that women were now able to save and had more means to take care of certain family-related expenses, in particular the payment of children's tuition fees.

### 6.3 The economic empowerment of women has not lead to increased participation in political decision making

The study endeavoured to determine whether the increased visibility of women in the economic sector had contributed to the economic empowerment of women, and if so, to which degree. The study also tried to clarify the impact of women's empowerment on their political participation.

It was very clear that the economic empowerment of women and their improved access to resources and control thereof had led to important changes in the management of household affairs. 25 percent of the 200 surveyed women felt that they participated in all decisions taken at the family level. It also appeared that women led a much more active public life than during the pre-war

<sup>60</sup> Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations.

period. Their freedom of movement and action is high and so is the level of acknowledgement of their right to take part in political and economic affairs. 79 percent of them said they had voted in the 2006 general election. Their role within the community has increased and many of them occupy leading positions in community structures, such as farmer associations. Close to half of the interviewed women said they had influence on their surroundings.

Despite these significant improvements, other indicators showed that the economic empowerment of women has not resulted in a breakthrough in the political sphere. Despite the increased importance of their roles in community structures, they remain widely excluded from local decision-making bodies. Very few women are members of local government, and their percentage in local assemblies does not exceed the 30 percent female representation quota foreseen by the 1997 law.

A subtle analysis of the reasons why women found it difficult to transpose their economic empowerment to political empowerment revealed a certain number of important constraints. It seems that, despite the substantial increase in women's income, volume of business and level of investment has stayed very low due to a lack of financial assets. Yields are not high enough to allow them to make a breakthrough. Only 18 percent of interviewed women had a monthly income over 300,000 Ugandan shillings.<sup>61</sup> The 2.5 percent of women who declared a monthly income in excess of UGX900,000<sup>62</sup> all lived in urban areas. It is therefore clear that the vast majority of women are still mainly working to meet their practical needs and ensure the survival of their families.

Northern Uganda is the country's most deprived region, with a high level of poverty, especially in rural areas. The majority of women using their income to address family needs and to pay for their children's tuition fees rather than to develop the necessary influence networks required to get involved in politics live in those rural areas. Various programmes for the region's reconstruction and development were set up at the end of the war by the government, international development agencies, the private sector and international NGOs. However, most of these programmes marginalise women and do not take into account the key role they play in the region's economic recovery. The long-term development initiatives set up by the "Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan" (PRDP), which is the Ugandan government's flagship programme for the rehabilitation of northern Uganda, are primarily aimed at men. The PRDP did not integrate the national and international instruments available to promote gender equality such as the Ugandan national gender policy, CEDAW or the Beijing Platform. Women are still considered in its programmes as a "vulnerable" group, which limits the extent and the impact of the initiatives dedicated to them.

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The burden of domestic labour and the double productive and reproductive roles played by women leave them with little time to engage in politics. Furthermore, most development plans for women set up by the government, international development agencies and NGOs require women to form groups of beneficiaries in order to benefit from support and obtain loans, as well as seeds and field equipment. In order to have access to these services, upon which they critically depend, women are forced to simultaneously join several groups and to take part in the numerous activities organised within these groups, which adds to their already heavy workload. Not only does this forced collectivisation limit individual potential, it also contributes to confining women

<sup>61</sup> Approximately USD135.

<sup>62</sup> Just over USD380.

to the logic of survival and meeting basic needs, to the detriment of a broader transformational agenda which would allow them to play more of a political role in the region's reconstruction.

Gender-based violence is still very widespread and represents a barrier to the participation of women in politics. The study attributed the high level of domestic violence to the reversal in relations and power dynamics within households, in view of the changes within gender roles. Many men reacted to the loss of their traditional role of providers and protectors of the family, and of part of their power within the family environment by developing what the study calls "negative masculinity", which results in the use of violence against their spouses. Some men interviewed during the survey felt that women's empowerment came at the expense of the power of men. One of them said that 'The empowerment of women is a good thing; however, the problem is the way in which they perceive power. They now consider that men are good for nothing'.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, it seems that the changes which took place in the sexual division of labour and in gender roles have neither fundamentally changed the ideological and institutional substructures of gender relations, nor have they led to a reorganisation of these relations with a more egalitarian perspective. On the contrary, the upsurge in domestic violence observed during the post-conflict period proves that, if gender roles can indeed change during conflict periods, gender identities are much more difficult to transform. According to certain analysts, during conflict periods, gender identities are not so much transformed as "thwarted", meaning that men, who, because of circumstances over which they have no control, are unable to fulfil their gender identity and masculinity in a manner they consider to be satisfactory, and then have the tendency to resort to violence because of the frustrations generated by this situation.<sup>64</sup>

There is also another type of violence, which is the violence that permeates Ugandan political life (particularly during election periods) and tends to discourage women from engaging in politics. Despite the fact that the vast majority of women vote, there is a much lower number of women who actually run for office, especially when it is for an opposition party. Violence has become an integral part of the country's political culture and appears to be one of the determining factors in poor political participation, not just of women but the general population as well.

<sup>63</sup> J. Ahikire, A. Madanda and C. Ampaire (2011). *Op. cit.*, p.46.

<sup>64</sup> J. El Bushra (2006). 'Power, agency and identity: turning vicious circles into virtuous ones', in H. Yanacopulos and J. Hanlon (eds) (2006). *Civil war, civil peace*. James Currey: Oxford.

## 7. Conclusions

One of the questions at the heart of the research project was whether periods of conflict and social crisis through which the four countries from the Great Lakes region went had generated opportunities for the greater participation of women in political and public life. This question is particularly important, as, according to certain analysts, violent conflicts and deep social crises create new dynamics, which potentially lead to social transformations. They contribute to the creation of political spaces, which can lead to changes in social relations, including gender relations, in post-conflict periods.<sup>65</sup> The transformations which take place in gender relations and the sexual division of labour during conflict periods foster positive changes in the status of women and can help start a debate on policies concerning gender equality.<sup>66</sup>

In the four studied countries, the war and the political transition periods allowed the emergence of women's organisations for peace and the promotion of women's rights at all levels of society. The women's movement played a key role in the adoption by states of policies promoting gender equality. The Arusha and Sun City peace talks were venues at which Burundian and Congolese women, despite their exclusion from the political resolution of the conflicts in their countries, were able to negotiate the principle of their increased representation in post-conflict political decision making. The adoption of quotas played a key role in the substantial increase of women in decision-making bodies, including local governance.

In northern Uganda, women were able to take advantage of the changes in the sexual division of labour and in gender roles, which occurred over twenty years of war, in order to take a more central position in the region's monetary economy. However, these important changes have not had any significant influence on governmental development and reconstruction policies in northern Uganda, which continue to exclude women. The economic empowerment of women did not transpose itself into increased participation in political decision making either. Furthermore, the example of northern Uganda shows that, even if the sexual division of labour can indeed be modified, it is much more difficult to manage a radical ideological and structural transformation, which makes a deep and lasting transformation of gender relations much more difficult. This poses the broader question of the consolidation and sustainability of the gains made by women: under which circumstances can the gains made by women be consolidated?<sup>67</sup>

The research studies raised another central question, closely linked to the first, concerning the nature and quality of the political participation of women and the impact of their representation within decision-making bodies. Indeed, the result of nearly five years of the implementation of the quota system in decision-making bodies in Burundi, and the analysis of the impact of the integration of gender into the decentralisation process in Rwanda, show that, despite the increased presence of women in governing bodies thanks to quotas, their influence within them remains low. They are still not able to influence those policies important for achieving gender equality. This puts into question the claim according to which increasing the number of women in decision-making positions would allow them to have an influence on policies, and to reduce gender inequalities at the social and economic level.<sup>68</sup> If it is true that increased female representation in decision-making bodies is absolutely essential, it is still not sufficient in itself to change public policies and patterns of resource

65 D. Pankhurst (2004). 'The "sex war" and other wars: towards a feminist approach to peace building', in H. Afshar and D. Eade (eds) (2004). *Development, women and war*. Oxfam GB: UK, pp.8-42.

66 D. Pankhurst (2002). 'Women and politics in Africa: The case of Uganda', in K. Ross (ed) (2002). *Women, politics and change*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

67 J. El Bushra (2003). *Women building peace: Sharing know-how*. International Alert: London.

68 S. Hassim (2006). 'The virtuous circle of representation; Women in African parliaments', in G. Bauer and H. Britton (eds) (2006). *Women in African parliaments*. Lynne Reiner Publishers.

allocation. This poses a question over the quality of the representation of women and over the type of political representation which could help to achieve more gender equality.

Political participation is a gendered process and the challenge with which women are faced is to understand how to transform institutions and political and economic systems which remain deeply masculine in nature. The institutionalisation of gains in order to change the socio-economic status of women constitutes another major challenge. Quotas and other mechanisms for the promotion of women have been established in contexts of structural and systemic inequality. The ideology, values and standards which support political, institutional and social systems evolve very slowly, whereas legislation, discriminating cultural practices and prejudice against women persist. This is one of the reasons why numerous gender equality policies, after being adopted, remain difficult to implement.

The lack of financial means and technical expertise in terms of the integration of a gender perspective into policies and programmes are further reasons which explain the shortcomings in the implementation of policies. Rwanda, which is one of the most advanced countries in terms of the promotion of gender equality in Africa, is cruelly lacking in technical expertise, for instance in terms of gender budgeting, which constitutes a hindrance to the effective implementation of gender issues in the decentralisation process. Budgets and resources allocated to the promotion of women remain meagre. The budgets of the ministries in charge of gender issues in Burundi and DRC represent less than 1 percent of the national budget. In Burundi, the ministry responsible for gender issues has two additional functions, national solidarity and human rights,<sup>69</sup> which potentially represent three ministries merged into a single entity. The mechanisms for the promotion of women and gender equality are regularly subject to budget cuts. During the reform of the Rwandan government's administration imposed by the World Bank in 2006, the ministry responsible for gender, family and social affairs was considerably reduced, with its staff reduced from seventy-five to five people. Since then, it has consisted of a small unit housed in the office of the Vice-president, with a limited role in policy elaboration and the coordination of implementation.

Some local players attribute the difficulties in implementing gender equality policies to the lack of political will of the ruling governments. This lack of political will could be in part due to the fact that the integration of gender equality into policies is not always the result of an endogenous initiative. It appears to be more and more often one of the conditionalities for international development support, especially in the cases of countries emerging from conflict. According to certain analysts, the representation of women emerges as one of the international conditions aimed at promoting global democratic governance. As a consequence, quotas would be adopted in post conflict countries under the direct influence of the international community and because of the concerned countries' need to gain access to development aid, foreign investment, as well as a good reputation and legitimacy at the international level.<sup>70</sup> However, as has been stressed, international institutions tend to essentially promote the technical aspects of local governance, and are less prone to address issues related to power relations, therefore excluding women.<sup>71</sup>

The political and security environment is not always conducive to the effective participation of women in political and public life. Indeed, the four countries analysed in this research project are the object of an ever-increasing foreclosure of the political arena, which is typified by restrictions on press freedoms, the banning of human rights organisations, as well as the assassination and extrajudicial executions of political opponents and opinion leaders. The elections held in the four countries over the past two to three years were all marred by violence and fraud. Political spaces are also shrinking because of worsening security conditions, particularly in Burundi, amid concerns about a resurgence of armed rebels, and in eastern DRC, which remains the epicentre of

<sup>69</sup> The ministry's exact name is: Ministry of Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender.

<sup>70</sup> S. Bush Sunn (2011). 'International politics and the spread of quotas for women in legislatures', *International Organization* 65, pp.103-107.

<sup>71</sup> C. Castillojo (2011). 'Building a state that works for women: integrating gender into post-conflict state building', *Working paper no. 107*. FRIDE: Madrid.

armed conflicts in the sub-region. The lack of political freedom considerably limits the influencing abilities of women and poses the problem of representation in authoritarian states. Genuine long-lasting gender equality policies can only be implemented in a context of democratic openness.

However, the increased representation and participation of women in the four studied countries seems to have led to a greater acceptance of women's leadership in the political arena and the economic sphere. The slow yet growing change of mentalities in this respect, as demonstrated by the case studies on Burundi and Rwanda, is without doubt one of the most significant impacts highlighted by the research.

## 8. Recommendations

The four case studies identified priorities and strategic actions to strengthen the participation of women in political and public life, as well as to acknowledge and support their pivotal role in the economic recovery in the region.

The recommendations are as follows:

### Burundi

- Create a statistical database on women's political participation;
- Assess progress made by Burundi in implementing its national and international commitments towards gender equality by using well-known gender indicators such as the African gender and development index (AGDI). This assessment could be carried out in collaboration between the government of Burundi, relevant United Nations agencies and civil society organisations;
- Pass the Bill on women's rights to inheritance and land ownership: the government and National assembly should pass the Bill reforming the Code on inheritance, matrimonial regimes and gifts, which has been under review since 2002;
- Integrate effectively the principle of gender equality into national policies and development programmes: it must be ensured that the Vision 2025 and the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) actively mainstream gender. This implies:
  - publicising and implementing national gender policy through the establishment of structures envisioned by the law such as the Gender National Council;
  - providing structures for gender equality with enough human and financial resources to efficiently accomplish their mission;
  - guaranteeing that the selection of women candidates to positions of power are based on merit and "representativity" in order to overcome objections to the introduction of quotas for women.
- Put in place mechanisms to allow the raising of the educational level of women and girls and reduce the burden of heavy workload: thought should be given to ways of allowing women to free up time aside from household work and daily domestic chores, such as fetching water and gathering firewood. Consideration should also be given to organising a wide functional literacy campaign, which would include, among others, components on political and civic education, the Family Code, resource management and family planning. This campaign would target both women and men;
- Develop and reinforce alliances and networks among women by putting in place a permanent structure for consultation between women politicians and those from civil society. Through this mechanism, joint programmes highlighting women's priorities would be developed and encourage those women elected to positions of power to commit themselves to it;
- Encourage women's political participation through specific concrete actions: develop partnerships between women's organisations and men who are sensitive and committed to gender equality (politicians, and religious, customary and civil society leaders) in order to strengthen advocacy for women's increased participation in political life and for gender equality;
- Encourage the government to respect its national, regional and international commitments on promoting gender equality: the support of the international community is essential to enable Burundi to meet its commitments on gender equality. In that sense, respect for gender equality should be a criterion for eligibility for international cooperation programmes negotiated with the Burundian government. The international community should also support capacity building for women regarding political participation and be involved in the monitoring of gender indicators.



## Rwanda

### For the Ministry of Local Government, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN)

- Develop a programme to build and strengthen the capacities of decentralised entities on gender analysis and gender planning and budgeting in order to improve the extent to which gender is taken into account in performance contracts and budgets. Methods of developing performance contracts must include specific gender indicators in each area of planning;
- Provide decentralised entities with gender experts to ensure that gender analysis is integrated at all stages of the decentralisation process;
- Support the districts in the production of development plans, taking into account the gender dimension and develop partnerships with stakeholders who work in decentralisation in order to influence the inclusion of gender in their planning;
- Include analysis of obstacles which communities face in the monitoring of public action in regular evaluations of the decentralisation process, especially with regard to gender, to enable the initiation of strategies to reduce these obstacles.

### For the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF)

- Strengthen the capacity of Ministry of Gender staff in charge of gender issues in the districts, so they become more capable of supporting and supervising gender mainstreaming in the plans and budgets of decentralised entities;
- Develop better quantitative and qualitative indicators allowing the measurement of changes in gender equality at the individual, institutional and community level;
- Support critical thinking and analysis designed to identify strategies and programmes to reduce women's heavy workload and provide support for women who work in decision-making bodies in decentralised entities (taking into account the obstacles to their participation). These analyses should influence the planning and budgeting of development actions on the part of decentralised entities and central government;
- Create a continuous education and awareness programme for local communities on gender equality to reduce resistance to change and support progress. The programme should also include discussions with families about educating their daughters to the highest possible level;

### For the National Council of Women (NCW) and other civil society organisations

- Support the local chapters of the NCW in decentralised entities to develop strategies to take part in decentralised governance processes, particularly in influencing participation mechanisms to better take gender equality issues into account;
- Encourage and facilitate networking between women leaders in decentralised entities to help them further their analysis on the obstacles to women's participation and conduct advocacy with relevant authorities.
- Redefine the role of NCW agents in the districts to allow cooperation and synergy with other units in districts, sectors and cells;
- Collaborate on or advocate for education programmes on leadership and other activities which strengthen the capacities of women in decision-making positions or candidates for these positions.

### For the Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA)

- Become involved in projects which promote gender equality in local government (such as PAGOR) and capitalise on gains so that other districts can also benefit from them;
- Initiate a network of women leaders in decentralised entities to help them examine more deeply the obstacles to women's participation and lobby the relevant decision-making bodies.

## Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- Establish inclusive and representative political structures by increasing and strengthening women's presence in central state and customary/community institutions and structures, as well as political parties. This would imply the adoption and effective implementation of the law on parity and subsequent reform of the electoral code;
- Develop and strengthen the political socialisation of women and transform the political behaviours of both women and men by mainstreaming gender into the various agents of socialisation, particularly schools, mass media and religious institutions;
- Make the link between the local and global level by bringing together state actors, women's organisations, local communities and wider civil society around a common ideal: working to promote women's participation in a context of national reconstruction.

## Northern Uganda

- Make gender a core element in the design and implementation of economic recovery programmes in northern Uganda;
- Ensure strategic institutional development for women: this requires extensive mobilisation of women, to train them on contracts and awards and to increase their capacity to form companies and joint ventures;
- Promote a political culture within women's groups and train women on how to effectively participate at various levels and form political alliances and coalitions across parties;
- Mobilise men and boys to reconstruct positive masculinities and involve them in actions to prevent and respond to violence against women. There is also an urgent need to bring men back into household provisioning and sustenance.





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